

Israeli air raid in Lebanon injures six

BEIRUT (AFP) — A Hizbollah fighter was found wounded on Friday, bringing to three the number of guerrillas injured in a raid by Israeli warplanes on a Hizbollah stronghold in southeast Lebanon the day before, hospital sources said. Three Lebanese goat-herders were also wounded when Israeli fighter-bombers fired four missiles on Jabal Abu Rashed, a hilltop south of the Bekaa valley adjacent to the Jewish state's self-declared "security zone" in south Lebanon. The air strikes came after overnight clashes between Shiite Muslim Hizbollah fighters and members of an Israeli patrol in the eastern sector of the border zone. An Israeli army spokesman said an anti-Israeli fighter was killed and a number of others wounded.

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Arafat pushes for Arab summit Netanyahu blames 1996 bombings for peace crisis

Combined agency
dispatches

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT Yasser Arafat will ask an Arab League meeting in Cairo next week for an Arab summit to confront Israeli intransigence in the stalled peace process, his chief of staff said Friday.

Tayeb Abdul Rahim said Mr. Arafat would speak Tuesday at an Arab League foreign ministers' meeting in the Egyptian capital.

"He will ask for an Arab summit, hopefully a full summit" to discuss the peace process, Mr. Abdul Rahim said on Palestinian television.

"We must stick to the Oslo agreements, we must work at isolating Israel and bring together all forces, Arab and international, to pressure Israel to implement the agreements," he said.

Peace negotiations with Israel have been deadlocked for 14 months, largely over Israel's failure to carry out further withdrawals from the West Bank as required under the Oslo interim autonomy agreements.

President Arafat has been calling for months for an Arab summit to challenge Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line stance, but so far to no avail.

Earlier this week France and Egypt issued a joint call for an international conference on the troubled peace process that in a first phase would not include Israel or the Palestinians.

Israel rejected the notion but the Palestinians agreed. Washington has so far been silent on the matter. (See story on page 12)

Meanwhile, Mr. Netanyahu defended himself Friday against charges his policies were killing the peace process, saying peace "collapsed" two years ago due to Palestinian terrorism.

"One of the misrepresentations [against Israel] is that as a result of this government's policies peace has collapsed. The truth is peace collapsed two years ago," before his government came to power, Mr. Netanyahu said.

Two years ago "we had no peace. We had a collapse of the basic deal of Oslo [self-rule accord]. We gave the Palestinians territory and they did not fight terrorism," Mr. Netanyahu told a meeting of ambassadors to Israel.

"The deal has still not been kept. The promised dismantling of terrorist groups has not been kept," he said, demanding a "systematic, consistent and effective battle against terrorism."

Mr. Netanyahu insisted there

was "very little room" for promised troop withdrawals from the West Bank which the United States has pressured him to conduct, because of the need to keep a "solid security rampart" between Israel and Palestinian-ruled land.

He said there had been a "ten-fold increase" in the number of Israelis killed in terrorist attacks because the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) did not stop anti-Israeli militants working in territories put under its control.

"The Israeli people at that time said there is no peace," he said, referring to the wave of anti-Israeli bombings in 1995 and 1996 which are often credited for bringing about Mr. Netanyahu's defeat of his Labour government predecessors in 1996 elections.

Mr. Netanyahu also insisted his government had given "unlimited support" to the Palestinian economy, saying increased prosperity in the Palestinian territories would "increase the chances for peace."

Mr. Netanyahu said the number of Palestinian labourers allowed entry into Israel was at "its highest, certainly in the past seven years," with 56,000 workers per day allowed in Israel in 1998, compared to 39,000 in 1996.

He said the number of merchants and businessmen allowed into Israel every day had increased almost four-fold from 1996 to reach 13,700 in 1998.

A U.N. report issued on Wednesday showed a mixed year for the Palestinian economy, with unemployment falling from 32 per cent in 1996 to 30 per cent in 1997, but with living standards also dipping in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Per capita gross national product fell in 1997 because GNP growth of three per cent fell short of the 4.5 per cent population increase, while average daily wages fell by 7.5 per cent to \$15.9 a day.

In an opinion poll published Friday, Mr. Netanyahu maintained his lead over Labour Party chief Ehud Barak as voters appeared unaffected by the deepening troubles in relations between his government and Israel's main ally, the United States.

The survey by the Gallup organisation for the Maariv newspaper indicated that 41 per cent of voters would back Mr. Netanyahu for reelection versus 37 per cent who would choose Mr. Barak.

Another 13 per cent would pick neither man and nine per cent were undecided.



Israeli soldiers check bags belonging to two Palestinians in Jerusalem's Old City Friday. Israeli security forces went on high alert before the annual "Jerusalem day" is held tomorrow, which will include the first military parade in occupied Arab east Jerusalem in 25 years (AFP photo)

Gingrich cancels visit to 'embassy site' in Jerusalem

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the request of the White House, House Speaker Newt Gingrich is cancelling plans to visit the proposed site of the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem, officials said Friday.

Mr. Gingrich's spokeswoman, Christina Martin, did not say why the request was made. But the planned visit had angered the Palestinians, who warned Mr. Gingrich that he could trigger bloodshed by meddling in the dispute over Jerusalem.

"At the request of the Clinton administration, Speaker Gingrich will not be visiting the embassy site in Jerusalem," said Ms. Martin. She said Mr. Gingrich's office usually coordinates his foreign travel with the administration. "We did it for China and we're doing it for Israel, and they simply requested that he did not attend."

Mr. Gingrich begins a four-day visit to Israel on Saturday.

In the most controversial part of the trip, Mr. Gingrich and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt had planned to visit the proposed site of the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem.

The United States and most other countries plan to keep their embassies in Tel Aviv until a final settlement is reached on the status of Jerusalem, which both Israel and the Palestinians claim as their capital. Israel occupied Arab east Jerusalem in 1967.

Clashes erupted between the Palestinians and the Israelis last summer after Congress passed a nonbinding resolution endorsing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and urging President Bill Clinton to move the embassy. The administration wants to wait until the Jerusalem question is settled in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

On Thursday, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat warned Mr. Gingrich against visiting the site, saying the

speaker was "playing with fire."

"I urge Mr. Gingrich to resort to sanity, wisdom, and far-sightedness and not to pour oil on the fire," Mr. Erekat said.

In a commentary that appeared in the Jerusalem Post Friday, Mr. Gingrich said the Palestinians, not Israel, are largely to blame for the lack of progress in Mideast peace talks.

Mr. Gingrich suggested that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is entitled to reject Mr. Clinton's proposal for an Israeli troop pullback from 13 per cent of the West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967.

"Israel, and Israel alone, must define the requirements of Israeli security," wrote Gingrich.

U.S. officials said this week that the Clinton administration might soon announce that the talks have failed and explain why.

Bromine deal with American firm not political — officials

By Ghadeer Taher
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan's decision to sign an accord with the American Albemarle Corporation to build a multi-million dollar bromine plant and drop negotiations with an Israeli firm was not influenced by political considerations, official and industry sources said Friday.

"There was no political implication involved in our decision to sign with Albemarle," one official said responding to remarks by Israel's Dead Sea Bromine (DSB) Group, which had been negotiating with Jordan to set up a similar project. "The offer by DSB tried to impose conditions which were totally unacceptable to us."

Jordan Dead Sea Industries (JODICO), which was formed by the Arab Potash Company (APC) and other investors, announced Tuesday it had signed a memo-

randum of understanding to set up a \$120 million bromine complex with Albemarle Corporation, a major U.S.-based competitor of Dead Sea Bromine.

Dead Sea Bromine President Asher Grinbaum was quoted by Reuters as saying that Jordan's decision to choose Albemarle after three years of negotiations with his company may have been linked to growing political tensions between Jordan and Israel.

Although economic ties, both at the official and private-sector level, have grown rapidly following the 1994 peace treaty, diplomatic relations have soured since the 1996 election of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Jordan has blamed for the 14-month deadlock in peace talks with the Palestinians.

The project, which is expected to be completed in the year 2001, will produce 50,000 tonnes of

bromine, 35,000 tonnes of calcium bromide and 50,000 tonnes of tetra-bromobisphenol. Albemarle, which will market the bromine and the two derivatives, will target Asian and European markets.

Mr. Grinbaum, who said DSB was still undecided on its response to the deal, claimed that negotiations with Jordan had been progressing smoothly on plans to build an \$80 million 30,000-50,000 bromine plant and an adjacent \$40 million chlorine plant on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea.

"Everything was going properly. We had a final version of the agreement, which went to the Jordanian government for approval," Mr. Grinbaum was quoted as saying. "They sent it back with comments and we had sent back revisions." However,

(Continued on page 3)

Pardon of Ma'an rioters closes chapter — deputy

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein's decision to pardon all suspects allegedly involved in the February anti-government riots in the town of Ma'an has closed this chapter once and for all, a Ma'an deputy said Friday.

Nayif Hlatat said that Wednesday's decision by King Hussein to pardon more than 100 suspects also includes those who remained at large.

The King's decision followed a meeting at the Royal Court with deputies

from Ma'an and the southern Badia who urged the King to pardon these detainees.

Tens of people were arrested after the two-day unrest following a pro-Iraq rally in the city, where one person was killed and more than 23 were injured.

The government imposed a week-long curfew and launched a manhunt after those suspected of being involved in the unrest activities.

But later on, tens of detainees were released on bail while more than 30 refused to surrender themselves and remained at

large. The deputy told the Jordan Times that only one person remained in custody on charges of being responsible for the killing of Mohammad Abdullah Katib.

Mr. Hlatat identified him as Mohammad Salim Al Awad.

Ma'an residents said that Katib was shot by policemen during the pro-Iraq rally, a charge denied by the government who said that Katib was shot from behind by one of those who took part in the rally.

(Continued on page 3)

Yemen 'satisfied' with progress in border talks with Saudi Arabia

SANAA (AFP) — Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh said he was "satisfied" Friday with the progress being made in long-running talks on the demarcation of the country's disputed border with Saudi Arabia.

"I am satisfied that we have managed to make major progress in the recent talks with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Mr. Saleh said in a statement published in Yemeni newspapers to mark the eighth anniversary of the country's unification.

"We are anxious to resolve all outstanding problems [with Riyadh] as soon as possible to serve the interests of the two countries and guarantee the security and stability of the Arabian Peninsula," the Yemeni president said.

Talks on the demarcation of the border have continued without agreement for the past three years and there were armed clashes between the two countries as recently as November 1997.

Relations between Riyadh and Sanaa have long been chequered — the Saudi authorities expelled hundreds of thousands of Yemeni immigrants in retaliation for Yemeni support for Baghdad following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

After previous border clashes in late 1994 and early 1995, the two governments signed an accord calling for the normalisation of relations

and the demarcation of their common frontier.

Under the agreement, Yemen gave up its demand for the return of the three provinces of Asir, Najran and Jizan, ceded to Saudi Arabia in 1934. But the two sides remain divided over how to delineate sizeable stretches of their border, notably that separating Saudi Arabia from former South Yemen.

A joint Saudi-Yemeni committee started fresh talks in Najran Tuesday, Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz said. "There are positive developments in these negotiations," he told Agence France Presse.

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Iran freer but society more fragile under Khatami

By Kianouche Dorrane

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran has become a freer and more tolerant society in the year since moderate Mohammad Khatami was elected president, but some warn that the hard-won achievements will be short-lived.

Young girls are now daring to expose more hair from under their scarves, the press is more audacious, there are fewer revolutionary slogans, and a lively cafe society has emerged among young people — all signs the Islamic authorities have at least partly understood the message of Mr. Khatami's election.

Mr. Khatami won nearly 70 per cent of the votes on May 23, 1997, against a conservative establishment candidate, on a promise to implement political, economic and social reform.

The enlightened cleric, who will celebrate the first anniversary of his election on Saturday,

still remains immensely popular, despite his limited margins of manoeuvre and mounting economic difficulties.

But his efforts to lead the country towards his vision of a democratic "civil society" have run into growing opposition from orthodox Islamic forces, who purport to serve as the guardians of the fundamental principles of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

But there have undoubtedly been gains.

Secular-minded women are still far from shedding their chadors, mandatory here since the revolution, but many young girls in the more liberal northern Tehran now dare to push back their scarves and show part of their hair without getting arrested.

As the hot season approaches, the more daring young women expose their bare ankles and polished toenails — not much by Western standards but enough to enrage the funda-

mentalists here.

Teenage boys follow the fashion in Paris, London or New York, wearing baseball hats, jeans and T-shirts, while older men feel more comfortable wearing ties, an accessory frowned upon here as a symbol of Western fashion.

But many worry that the more relaxed atmosphere may be short-lived.

"All this is fragile and no one knows what will happen tomorrow," said Ahmad, a university professor.

The culture ministry, now run by a moderate intellectual, Ataollah Mohajerani, has eased press censorship and draconian regulations in the film industry. Despite threats of harassment from extremists, Iranians can now watch movies previously banned for their controversial subjects.

During the new year holiday in March, the state-run television aired a dozen American films, albeit censored and a lit-

tle too outdated for the taste of the young Iranians who have access to the latest Hollywood productions through pirate videos.

Officials say they have issued 991 permits for publications, a record number in the country's history. Independent newspapers and magazines have mushroomed, including tabloid-like publications to quench the thirst for gossip.

The cartoon magazines have a wider margin to manoeuvre, and they now mock subjects that would have been considered taboo before.

One such magazine, Gol-e-azad, sketched on the cover the cartoons of two veiled women with bushy moustaches carrying a patient on a stretcher in a hospital. It was a stab at a parliamentary bill to segregate the sexes in medical services.

Mr. Khatami says his prime goal is to institutionalise the new freedoms, but many are worried that he might not suc-

ceed, despite his popular mandate. "More than half of the population is under the 20 years old. They want that their aspirations be taken into account. Khatami's election is the outcome of this phenomenon," said Mashallah Shams Al Vaezin, editor-in-chief of Jameh, a liberal newspaper sympathetic to the president.

Tehran police still launch sweeps against young girls and boys defying the strict Islamic codes, and vigilante groups, known as "Hizbollah" continue to fight all signs of liberal Western culture.

And still languishing on death row are an Iranian journalist accused of adultery and spying and a German businessman accused of having a sexual affair with a Muslim woman. "All democracies are like a minefield," Shams Al Vaezin said. "The difference is that in the West you have a map and can find the explosives, but here you don't."

كلامه لاجل

Hamas says Israeli withdrawals will not stop suicide bombings

DAMASCUS (AP) — Palestinian suicide bombings will go on regardless of any Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank, the spiritual leader of Hamas said Friday.

Speaking to reporters in the Syrian capital, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin said an Israeli troop withdrawal was "of no value and the struggle will continue until occupation ends."

Sheikh Yassin did not make clear if by "occupation" he meant the Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip or the state of Israel. Some Palestinians do not recognise Israel's existence and define Palestine as the territory administered by Britain until 1948.

Hamas suicide bombers killed scores of people in Israel in 1996 and 1997.

"We will not stop suicide operations because Israeli withdrawals will not amount to a solution to our cause," Sheikh Yassin said.

Sheikh Yassin, 61-year-old quadriplegic, is on a tour of Muslim countries to promote his group, which rejects the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. He arrived in Damascus on Thursday and met Friday with the speaker of parliament, Abdul Qader Qadoura, and Syria's supreme Muslim cleric, Ahmad Kastaro.

He has also been meeting leaders of Damascus-based Palestinian factions who oppose the peace agreements. He said Thursday he was trying to unite Palestinian opposition groups for an armed struggle against Israel.

He says the alternative to the peace accords is "jihad" or holy war.

"What was taken by force must be restored by force," he said Friday.

Iran has not stopped smuggling of illegal Iraqi oil, U.S. official says

WASHINGTON (AP) — After brief attempts to help enforce U.N. economic sanctions on Iraq, neighboring Syria is again allowing ships smuggling Iraqi oil to pass through its territorial waters, a senior U.S. official said Thursday.

Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering said the Clinton administration is concerned about the traffic in oil and petroleum products and is seeking ways to make Iraq accountable for it or to end it through tougher enforcement mechanisms.

"The fact that Iraq continues to export petroleum products illegally... and that the Iraqi government refuses to permit the United Nations to oversee and monitor these sales, strongly suggests that the proceeds from these sales are intended very clearly for non-humanitarian purposes," said Mr. Pickering.

Addressing a joint hearing by the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Mr. Pickering said Iraq sells more than 200,000 barrels of oil illegally each day.

The oil goes through Turkey, Jordan and the Gulf, where a U.S.-led multinational naval force carries out patrols in international waters to intercept the ships.

Mr. Pickering said that at the beginning of the year, the administration noted that Iran was stopping the smuggling. Now, it is permitting it.

"We would not be surprised if the smugglers pay a considerable price to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards naval forces, which are otherwise supposed to keep that smuggling from happening," said Mr. Pickering.

Mr. Pickering also said that the sanctions, imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait which sparked the Gulf war, "will be a fact of life for the foreseeable future." He said an oil-for-food deal, an exception to the sanctions that allows Iraq to use the oil revenue for food and medicine purchases, should remain in place.

Israel lists Russian firms selling military technology to Iran

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel has given Russia a list of Russian firms which it says are providing military technology to Iran, particularly in the nuclear field, an Israeli minister disclosed Thursday.

Trade and Industry Minister Nathan Sharansky, who is currently visiting Moscow, said on Israeli television that he had given the list to the Russian authorities.

"They have promised to act against these firms. But our aim is to do everything to ensure that this translates as quickly as possible into results on the ground," he said.

Mr. Sharansky held talks late Thursday with Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko.

The television said Mr. Sharansky had been invited by the Russian government which wanted to brief him on the creation of a watchdog body to supervise arms firms and prevent illegal transfers of military technology.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday issued a new warning about Iran's alleged programme to develop nuclear weapons.

Talking to Chinese journalists, ahead of a trip to China, Mr. Netanyahu said that an Iran with nuclear weapons would create "enormous destabilisation not just in our region but also in the whole world."

At a meeting in Jerusalem with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posolayuk on Wednesday, Mr. Netanyahu urged Russia not to allow Iran to benefit from military technology transfers in the missile or in nuclear fields.

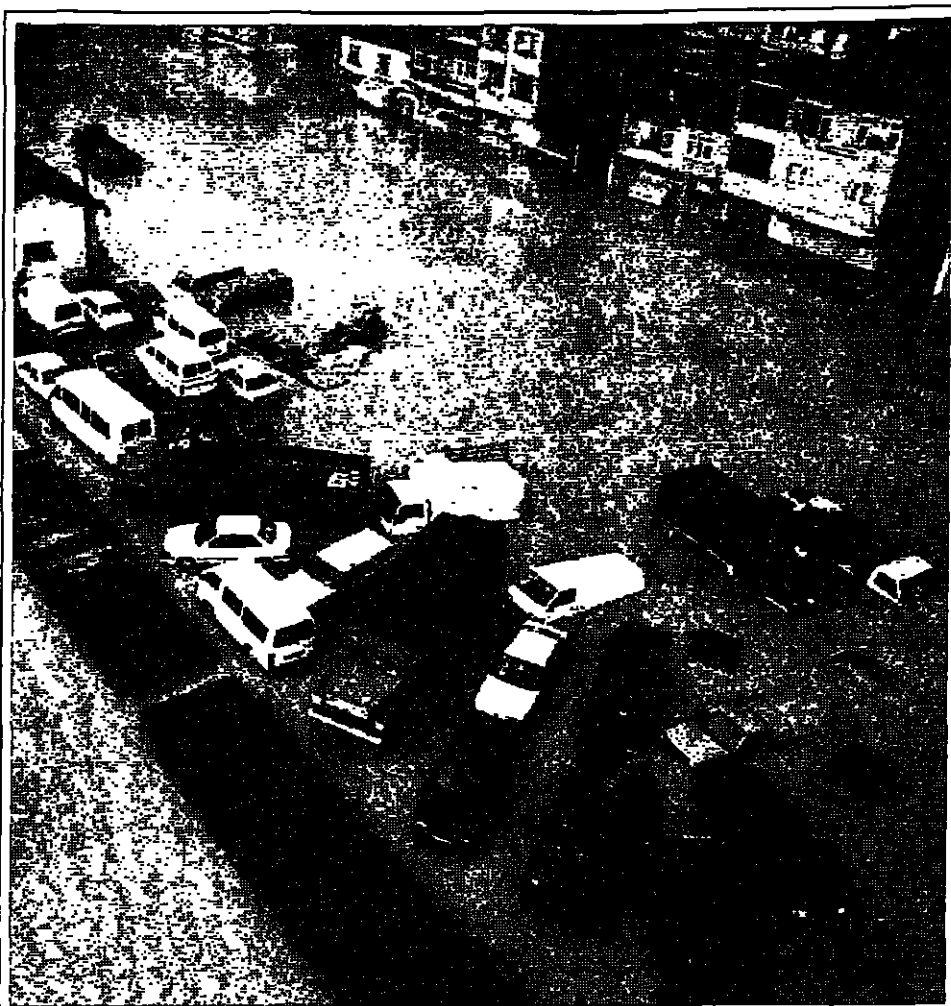
Iran has denied that it is working to develop nuclear weapons.

Russia has also rejected Mr. Netanyahu's charge that Moscow has failed to put a stop to leaks of Russian missile technology to Iran.

In April, the Jerusalem Post said Iran had bought two nuclear warheads for \$25 million from a country of the former Soviet Union.

The Post cited secret Iranian government documents dating from 1991 and 1992, in which Iranian intelligence officers spoke of obtaining "two tactical nuclear weapons from Russia" for \$25 million.

The documents were sent by an exiled Iranian scientist to the Israeli member of parliament Rafi Elul, who confirmed their existence but declined to comment on the contents.



FLOODS IN TURKEY: Cars are stranded in the flood waters near the train station in the centre of Black Sea town of Bartin. Turkish aid workers distributed bread by boat on Friday in Bartin, stricken by flooding that has killed at least 13 people across the country (Reuters photo)

Lebanese elections delayed in districts around Beirut

BEIRUT (AFP) — The first municipal elections in 35 years will be delayed until June 28 in nine districts of Mount Lebanon around Beirut where the balloting was scheduled for Sunday, the interior ministry announced Friday.

The delay was made "for reasons related to the security and legitimacy of electoral operations," the ministry said in a statement.

The delay provoked an outcry from opposition candidates, who told reporters that the decision was a political one.

The delay was "arbitrary and illegal," said Hikmat Dib and Georges Haddad, two candidates who head the Christian opposition list in the town of Hadath.

"It is connected to the inevitable defeat of government figures who have failed to form a list of candidates enjoying the slightest popular support," the two candidates said in a joint statement.

The government "realised at the last moment that the incomplete list backed by the government and consisting of members of parties allied with the government had no chance of election," Sami Toubi, a candidate in Beit Shabab, told AFP.

Legal expert and former MP Hassan Rifai said the elections could not be delayed except for reasons of "force majeure."

An appeal against the delay could be lodged with the consultative council, the highest authority on legislative matters, he said in a statement.

The municipal elections are scheduled to be held every Sunday until June 14 in different regions of the country.

Voters will elect lists of municipal councillors and registrars in a single round of voting. The councillors will then hold elections for the office of mayor.

Mortar fire on pro-Israeli militia positions wounds Lebanese civilian

MARIYOUN (AFP) — Mortar fire directed at the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia from government-held territory wounded a Lebanese civilian Friday, the militia's radio reported.

The radio did not identify the woman who it said was injured in Riha village near the SLA-held town of Jezzinn just north of the Israeli-occupied border strip.

There was no claim of responsibility from Hizbollah, the Shiite Muslim group which carries out the majority of attacks against the Israeli army and its allies in southern Lebanon.

Israel has protested against the mortar fire to the south Lebanon cease-fire monitoring committee, an army spokesman in Jerusalem said.

Israeli air raids Thursday wounded three Lebanese civilians as well as three Hizbollah fighters, hospital officials said.

Ten Lebanese civilians have been killed in southern Lebanon so far this year and a further 45 injured according to figures compiled by AFP.

Bomb kills 15 in Algerian marketplace

ALGIERS (AP) — A bomb exploded Friday in a packed market in an Algiers suburb, killing at least 15 people and wounding more than 30, hospital authorities said in a statement.

At least three of the victims died in the resulting stampede, doctors said.

The bomb, in the western suburb of Al Harach, appeared to have exploded in a carton of vegetables, said a nurse on the scene who spoke on condition of anonymity.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack in the Boumerdes market in Al Harach, one of the biggest in the Algeria area.

Police immediately blocked off the market.

For two years, access to the market has been closely monitored for security reasons. There were about 1,000 people when the morning explosion took place.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinian minister Shaath concludes visit

AMMAN (Petra) — Palestinian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Nabil Shaath on Friday concluded an official four-day visit to the Kingdom during which he held talks with HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs and Foreign Minister Jawad Anani. The Crown Prince stressed Jordan's full and strong support for the Palestinians in their struggle to regain their legitimate rights and establish an independent state on Palestinian soil in conformity with U.N. Security Council resolutions. Dr. Shaath and senior Jordanian officials discussed means of further developing bilateral relations. He stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination between Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on the Bethlehem project, which includes tourist and cultural programmes. The project will be implemented in the year 2000 to mark the anniversary of the birth of Christ.

UAE order for U.S. F-16s worth \$6 billion — air force commander

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Emirati Air Force Commander Khalid Ben Abdullah Al Mazrui said Friday that an order placed with the United States for 80 F-16 fighter planes would cost the United Arab Emirates \$6 billion. "The amount of the transaction, six billion dollars, will be paid over the course of the contract and until the delivery of the last aircraft and corresponding equipment," General Mazrui told the WAM news agency. The deal, which was announced May 12 in Washington, also includes AMRAAM air-to-air missiles and HARM anti-radar missiles, according to a Pentagon spokesman.

Qadhafi gets Indian message on nuclear tests

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi received a message on Thursday from Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee which sought to justify India's recent nuclear tests by the refusal of other countries to abandon nuclear weapons, Libya's JANA news agency reported. In his letter, Mr. Vajpayee said his country had campaigned against nuclear proliferation but its appeals "were ignored" by the countries which already possessed or were developing nuclear weapons. He said that 40 years ago, these same countries had carried out more than 2,000 tests, according to JANA, which said Colonel Qadhafi was preparing to reply to Vajpayee.

Iraq publicly executes two men for murder and theft

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq executed two men for killing a hospital ward and stealing medicine, a newspaper reported Friday. The men were killed by firing squad in Beiji, 200 kilometres north of the capital Baghdad, the weekly Al Ilam said. To stem rising crime, the government has recently passed legislation making murder and repeated theft punishable by death. The newspaper did not identify the men or say when the execution occurred. They were executed in public near the hospital, it said.

Syria slams U.S. leniency towards Israel as FM prepares to meet Albright

DAMASCUS (AFP) — The official Syrian press Friday slammed the U.S. administration for its leniency towards Israel as Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al Sharara prepared to meet U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

"If Washington had taken its role as sponsor of the peace process seriously, we would not need new initiatives to revive the talks deadlocked by Israeli intransigence on all its tracks — Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian," said the ruling party daily Al Baath.

U.S. leniency had encouraged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to scorn and defy the whole world, the paper said.

"The whole world is waiting for a decisive American move which will put an end to the Israeli government's efforts to kill the peace process," it said.

Ms. Albright has a full agenda of issues for her talks with Mr. Sharara in Washington on Friday. U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Thursday.

Ms. Albright will convey "our desire to find a way to put the Israeli-Syrian peace track back on track," he said.

Israel and Syria held peace talks between 1991 and 1996 but there have been no direct contacts since Mr. Netanyahu was elected to office in May 1996 on a pledge not to return the Golan Heights to Damascus.

Syria insists that peace talks can only resume on the basis of an Israeli agreement in principle to return the strategic plateau it captured in the 1967 war.

5 suspects in Turkish activist attack arrested

ANKARA (AP) — Police on Friday arrested two gunmen and three other people suspected of organising an attack last week on a prominent human rights activist, Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz announced.

The gunmen critically wounded Akin Birdal, head of the independent Human Rights Association, at his Ankara office May 12.

Mr. Birdal, 50, is well respected in the West for his opposition to torture and the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages in southeastern Turkey. He remains hospitalised.

During initial questioning, the five confessed they had carried out the attack. Turkish Interior Minister Murat Basoglu said.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION	
Tel. 773111-19	
PROGRAMME TWO	
15:10	Cartoon — Jonny Quest
15:30	.....I Wanna Be
16:00	Drama — Neighbours
16:30	.....Doc — Ocean Wild
17:00	French Programme — "Faut Pas Réver"
17:55	Roland Garros '98 (summary)
18:20	.....Acapulco Bay
19:00	.....Le Journal
19:15	.....French Programme
19:30	.....News headlines
19:35	Quiz Show — You Bet Your Life
20:00	.....Cinema, Cinema
20:30	.....Prism
21:00	.....Drama — Sirens
22:00	.....News in English
22:30	Feature film — "Sweet Dream"
23:45	.....Country Music
PRAYER TIMES	
03:59	.....Fajr
05:29	.....(Sunrise) Dhuha
12:32	.....Dhuhr
16:13	.....'Asr
19:35	.....Maghreb
21:06	.....Isha
CHURCHES	
St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifheh, Tel. 5930740	
Assemblies of God Church Tel.	

4632785	St. Joseph Church Tel.
4624590	Terra Sancta Church Tel.
4622366	Anglican Church Tel.
4634833/4624811	St. Aftem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751.
4634833/4624811	Amman International Church Tel. 865897
4634833/4624811	German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
4634833/4624811	The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
4634833/4624811	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 454932
4634833/4624811	St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
4634833/4624811	Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
4634833/4624811	Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
4634833/4624811	Church of Presentation, Sweifheh Tel. 5920146
4634833/4624811	The United Catholic Church Tel. 4634757
4634833/4624811	The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
4634833/4624811	Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
4634833/4624811	The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
4634833/4624811	The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
4634833/4624811	The Armenian Orthodox

WEATHER	
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology	
It will be fine with clouds appearing at low altitudes and winds northwesterly moderate to active. On Sunday and Monday temperatures are expected to rise gradually. In Aqaba, it will be moderate, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.	
Min./Max. temp.	11/24
Amman	18/33
Aqaba	18/28
Deserts	08/23
Jordan Valley	16/31
Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 23 Aqaba 33 Humidity readings: Amman 27 per cent. Aqaba 40 per cent.	
USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS	
NIGHT DUTY	AMMAN:

EMERGENCIES	
Food Control Centre.....4637111	
Civil Defence Department.....5661111	
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue.....4630341	
Rescue Police 192.....4621111/4637777	
Fire Brigade.....4617101	
Blood Bank.....775121	
Highway Police.....843402	
Traffic Police.....896390	
Public Security Dept.....4630321	
Hotel Complaints.....5605800	
Price Complaints.....5661176	
Water & Sewage Complaints.....87467	
Amman Municipality Complaints.....787111	

HOSPITALS	
AMMAN:	
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199	
The Islamic Abdi.....5666131/7	
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 5856856	
Luzmih.....4630195	
Khalidi Maternity.....4642811/6	
Akileh Maternity.....4642441/2	
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362	
Malhas J. Amman.....4636140	
Palestine Shmeisani.....5607071	
Shmeisani Hospital.....5353444	
University Hospital.....566727/9	
Al-Muhsen Hospital 566727/9	
Al-Ahli, Abdi.....5664161/6	
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 771011/3	
Al-Bashir.....775111/26	

ARRIVALS	
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	
09:00 .....Damascus (RJ)	
09:45 .....New Delhi (RJ)	
10:10 .....Beirut (RJ)	
10:30 .....Karachi, Dubai (RJ)	
10:50 .....Doha, Bahrain (RJ)	
11:25 .....Colombo (RJ)	
11:35 .....New York, Amsterdam (RJ)	
17:05 .....Cairo (RJ)	
17:30 .....London (RJ)	
23:30 .....Paris (add) (RJ)	
23:30 .....Frankfurt (RJ)	
23:59 .....Paris (RJ)	
05:30 .....Bangkok (RJ)	
Other Flights	
06:05 .....London, Damascus (BA)	
14:10 .....Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)	
15:05 .....Vienna (OS)	
18:00 .....Dubai, Muscat (EK)	
19:00 .....Paris (AF)	
19:05 .....Frankfurt (LH)	
23:35 .....Cairo (MS)	
23:40 .....Amsterdam (KL)	
23:45 .....Beirut (ME)	
01:05 .....London, Damascus (BA)	
02:05 .....Belgrade (JU)	
03:00 .....Rome (AZ)	
Royal Wings (RW)	

DEPARTURES	
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	
07:00 .....Beirut (RJ)	
12:00 .....Aqaba, Paris (RJ)	
12:00 .....Berlin, Frankfurt (RJ)	
12:30 .....Amsterdam, New York (RJ)	
13:00 .....Geneva, London (RJ)	
13:15 .....Cairo (RJ)	
14:00 .....Brussels (RJ)	
14:55 .....Madrid (RJ)	
21:10 .....Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)	
21:20 .....Jeddah (RJ)	
21:30 .....Bombay (RJ)	
22:00 .....Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)	
02:30 .....Aqaba, Paris (RJ)	
Other Flights	
07:00 .....Beirut (ME)	
07:35 .....Damascus, London (BA)	
15:00 .....Abu Dhabi, Bahrain (GF)	
15:50 .....Vienna (OS)	
19:00 .....Dubai (EK)	
19:00 .....Paris (AF)	
19:05 .....Frankfurt (LH)	
23:35 .....Cairo (MS)	
23:40 .....Amsterdam (KL)	
23:45 .....Beirut (ME)	
01:05 .....London, Damascus (BA)	
02:05 .....Belgrade (JU)	
03:00 .....Rome (AZ)	
Royal Wings (RW)	
08:00 .....Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)	
21:30 .....Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)	

JORDAN TELEVISION	
Tel. 773111-19	
PROGRAMME TWO	
15:10	Cartoon — Jonny Quest
15:30	.....I Wanna Be
16:00	Drama — Neighbours
16:30	.....Doc — Ocean Wild
17:00	French Programme — "Faut Pas Réver"
17:55	Roland Garros '98 (summary)
18:20	.....Acapulco Bay
19:00	.....Le Journal
19:15	.....French Programme
19:30	.....News headlines
19:35	Quiz Show — You Bet Your Life
20:00	.....Cinema, Cinema
20:30	.....Prism
21:00	.....Drama — Sirens
22:00	.....News in English
22:30	Feature film — "Sweet Dream"
23:45	.....Country Music
PRAYER TIMES	
03:59	.....Fajr
05:29	.....(Sunrise) Dhuha
12:32	.....Dhuhr
16:13	.....'Asr
19:35	.....Maghreb
21:06	.....Isha
CHURCHES	
St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifheh, Tel. 5930740	
Assemblies of God Church Tel.	

Home

Israeli athletes King for peace

By Alia A. Toukan
Special to Jordan Times

AMMAN — Thousands of Israeli sports men and women on Thursday sent a letter of gratitude and appreciation to the Jordanian people and to His Majesty King Hussein for his support of the latter in the Middle East peace process.

"We wish to thank His Majesty King Hussein for his support of the peace process between the Jewish State and the State of Israel, and for his support of the Middle East peace process," the letter said.

The letter was signed by the Israeli Olympic Committee and the Israeli Paralympic Committee.

The letter was presented to the King by the Israeli Ambassador to Jordan, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Prime Minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, and to the Minister of Education, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Health, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Labour, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Agriculture, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Industry, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Tourism, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Culture, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Social Security, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Housing, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Transport, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Communications, Yehoshua Golan.

The letter was also presented to the Minister of Justice, Yehoshua Golan, and to the Minister of Finance, Yehoshua Golan.

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Israeli athletes thank King for peace efforts

By Alia A. Toukan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Thousands of Israeli sports men and women on Thursday sent a letter of "gratitude and appreciation" to the Jordanian people and to His Majesty King Hussein for his support of the faltering Middle East peace process.

"We wish to thank His Majesty King Hussein for his support of the peace process between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the state of Israel, and we send a message of gratitude and appreciation to all the Jordanian people," read the letter, made available to the Jordan Times by a source at Aqaba City Hall.

The signatories also called for "peace and mutual respect between all the peoples of the Middle East."

The letter was delivered by several sports men and women, five members of the Knesset, the Israeli deputy minister of education and sports, Moshe Peled, and the mayor of Eilat, Gabi Kadosh, to the mayor of Aqaba, Abdul Karim Malahme, who met the delegation at the Aqaba-Eilat border.



HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, with the visiting Palestinian Legislative Council delegation (Photo by Boghos)

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Thursday said the

numerous and major challenges facing both Jordanians and Palestinians demand closer

coordination and cooperation for the sake of serving both peoples.

Numerous challenges require closer Jordanian-Palestinian cooperation — Regent

Addressing a visiting delegation from the Palestinian Legislative Council at the Royal Court, the Regent called for bolstering contacts between the two peoples on an objective and scientific basis.

He also called for increasing cooperation between Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority, deepening the common identity denominators within a framework of integration and continued work toward crystallising stands vis-à-vis common problems and challenges.

Stating that "our common

emotional march knows no limits," the Regent reaffirmed the Kingdom's full support for the Palestinian people and their struggle to establish an independent state on Palestinian soil.

The head of the Palestinian delegation, Ziyad Abu Omar, expressed the Palestinian people's appreciation of His Majesty King Hussein, Crown Prince Hassan and the Jordanian government for their consistent and absolute support for the Palestinian people and their endeavours to help them regain their legitimate rights.

Mr. Abu Omar said the delegation chose Jordan as the first country to visit as an expression of the special status of the Kingdom in the minds and the hearts of the Palestinian people.

The delegation earlier met the speakers and members of the Senate and the Lower House of Parliament to discuss future cooperation.

The meeting with the Regent was attended by House Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srour and the chief of the Royal Court, Fayez Tarawneh.

Customs duties waived on new type of telecommunications equipment

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Council of Ministers Thursday approved a customs exemption on trunk radios' infrastructure equipment in accordance with the government's new direction towards liberalising telecommunications in the Kingdom.

The customs exemption on the infrastructure equipment is a strategic incentive, said Sami Gammo, minister of transport and telecommunications and chairperson of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC).

"The [customs] exemption goes hand in hand with the government's new direction to liberalise the telecommunications sector," said Dr. Gammo.

"Liberalising the telecommunications sector means that all services will be available in the future within the context of price cutting competition," stressed Dr. Gammo, adding that "telecommunications services are the backbone of any business venture... providing an attractive environment for luring foreign investment to this country."

Trunk radios provide a flat-rate medium of communication for taxi drivers in major metropolitan areas around the world and truck drivers in Europe and the United States. Similar to police radios, which use closed wide-area networks, trunk radio users can listen in on all dispatches from the base station or transmit privately from one subscriber to another.

The customs exemption means companies that earlier this year bid to establish the Kingdom's first two private trunk-radio networks must resubmit their bids, taking

into account the cost difference.

A TRC source quoted by the Arabic daily Al Ra'i said a new deadline for resubmitting the licence acquisition bids will be announced soon before the TRC chooses the first two private sector trunk radio operators.

According to the Jordan News Agency, Petra, the Jordan Telecommunications Company (JTC) may also bid. If approved, it would become the third trunk radio operator.

Similar to current telecommunications service operators in the market, once the trunk radio operators are established, they will be subject to annual operating and bandwidth leasing fees, which will increase with the growth of their income from the telecommunications sector, said Youssef Abu Jamouse, TRC director general.

Eventually, operating fees will be proportional to each operator's income from the telecommunications sector, Mr. Abu Jamouse added.

Meanwhile, Dr. Gammo invited members of the private sector to contact his office directly if they faced any obstacles regarding phone line applications or special communication networks, such as those used for trunk radios and intranets.

Noting that the National Telecommunications Programme aims to double the present 420,000 phone-line subscriptions across the Kingdom within two years, Dr. Gammo said there were 135,000 pending phone-line applications that would be served by the end of the year.

The JTC and the various military communications divisions will pool their resources to ensure that the deadline will be met, he told the Jordan Times.

In an interview with the Arabic service of the London-based Spectrum radio, Dr. Majali said the peace process has faltered as a result of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's strategy, which he described as completely different from the strategies of previous Israeli governments.

"It is regrettable to see repeated attempts made in vain to force Israel to comply with the requirements of peace," added Dr. Majali.

The prime minister said Mr. Netanyahu's intransigence and his refusal to implement the peace agreements, rejection of peace and hardened policies have caused him to lose credibility in the eyes of the world, specifically in the U.S. and Europe.

Crown Prince asks committee to address economic imbalances, resource distribution

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, has asked a higher ministerial committee on fighting poverty and increasing social productivity to address the country's economic imbalances and the distribution of resources.

These measures should be taken within a framework for achieving increased cooperation and integration among Jordan's various state sectors, said the Regent at the meeting, which was dedicated to discussing executive plans for

social productivity programmes.

The future challenges facing Jordan lie in reconciling various policies with one another and working toward arriving at an integrated and comprehensive approach for dealing with problems and with the various aspects of the development process, the Regent said.

He called on the committee to reconcile policies to realise the main objectives of development: improving the standard of living of Jordanian citizens and reaching further levels of

social justice.

At the meeting, which was attended by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and the chief of the Royal Court, Fayez Tarawneh, Prince Hassan emphasised the importance of enhancing the concept of the "state sector," which he said comprises both the public and the private sectors, and called for the introduction of reforms in this sector in a manner that would help the country deal with future challenges.

The country's objective is sustainable development, which requires consistent participation by and dialogue among all concerned parties for the sake of achieving a better future for Jordanian citizens, the Crown Prince said.

During the meeting, a general review was made of the measures that will be taken to guarantee the execution of the social productivity programmes adopted by the government last year to improve living standards and modernise infrastructure services in the underdeveloped regions of Jordan.

23-year-old commits suicide in Tafileh

AMMAN (J.T.) — A 23-year-old man wanted by the police committed suicide on Thursday in Tafileh, in southern Jordan, according to a local newspaper report.

A report in the Arabic daily Al Ra'i on Friday said the man, identified as H.S.M., shot himself before policemen and family members following an aborted escape attempt.

The police were chasing him during a funeral in the Al Hasa area, according to Tafileh Governor Nayer Njaid. The man shot and slightly injured a police officer, who is now recovering at a hospital.

The concerned parties are investigating the case with the Tafileh prosecutor general and the forensic medicine department.

Attorneys appeal man's April conviction for weapons possession

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The defence attorneys of a 34-year-old man serving a four-year sentence for attempting to manufacture explosives and possessing illegal weapons appealed the case Thursday to the Court of Cassation.

Ismat Shukri was originally charged with smuggling weapons to the West Bank and plotting subversive acts, but the State Security Court convicted him of the amended charges in April.

The defendant was first sentenced to seven and one-half years with hard labour, but the court commuted the sentence "because the defendant had no criminal record and supports a family."

Mr. Shukri had testified in court that he owned machine guns because he was a member of a radical Palestinian group until 1992 and that the hand

grenade the authorities seized from his house was in fact "a piece of a small metal box in the shape of a grenade that I found in the street and gave to my children to play with as a toy."

The prosecution charged that the arms and the grenade, which was filled with potassium nitrate, were intended for attacks.

Several prosecution witnesses testified under oath that they found automatic weapons and explosives in the defendant's house and in a suitcase hidden in the Zira area near the Dead Sea that the prosecution charged belonged to Mr. Shukri.

In their nine-page appeal to the Court of Cassation, Mr. Shukri's defence attorneys, Saleh Armouti, Salam Shumar and Islam Elian, contested the interrogation procedures, arguing that "our client was questioned by security forces instead of the state prosecutor."

In addition, the defence team said the State Security Court based its decision "on the testimony of our client, who was subjected to mental pressure after being detained and questioned by security forces for two months before being referred to the State Prosecution."

The defence team also referred to a statement given at the five-month trial by an explosives expert, who testified that the substance the authorities found in Mr. Shukri's possession could not be detonated.

"But the State Court did not take into consideration the expert's testimony, which proved that our client did not possess any explosive substances," the appeal argued.

Two other defendants, Ali Abdul Karim and Mohammad Mubarak, both tried in 15-year imprisonment terms with hard labour.

Majali urges U.S. to put more pressure on Israel

LONDON (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali has urged the United States to put increased pressure on Israel as part of efforts to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East.

In an interview with the Arabic service of the London-based Spectrum radio, Dr. Majali said the peace process has faltered as a result of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's strategy, which he described as completely different from the strategies of previous Israeli governments.

"It is regrettable to see repeated attempts made in vain to force Israel to comply with the requirements of peace," added Dr. Majali.

The prime minister said Mr. Netanyahu's intransigence and his refusal to implement the peace agreements, rejection of peace and hardened policies have caused him to lose credibility in the eyes of the world, specifically in the U.S. and Europe.

"Indeed, Netanyahu's policies have helped lead to unprecedented worldwide support for the Palestinian people's cause," he added.

Referring to the European role in the peace process, Dr. Majali said major developments, particularly in economic support for the countries of the region, have taken place.

He said Europe is seeking to make its call for peace heard and is demanding that the signed peace agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis be implemented.

On the recent visit by British Prime Minister Tony Blair to the region, Dr. Majali said he was "shocked" to discover the truth about the situation in Palestinian refugee camps.

Asked about the opposition in Parliament, the prime minister said there are more opposition groups in the present Parliament than in the previous one.

But despite the opposition in the previous 12th Parliament, the House endorsed the peace treaty with Israel by a majority vote as well as the sales tax law, among others, he said.

Asked if Jordan fears Iraq's alleged mass destruction weapons, Dr. Majali said Iraq is an Arab sister state and a neighbour with which it shares many interests. He added that the U.N. inspectors have proved that Iraq no longer possesses nuclear weapons or long-range missiles.

But Israel, on the other hand, possesses both, Dr. Majali said, noting that despite the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, Israeli agents used chemical weapons in an assassination attempt against a Jordanian citizen in one of Amman's main streets.

Referring to the joint U.S.-Jordanian military exercises, he said Jordan is not the only regional country to participate in such exercises, noting that Egypt, the Gulf states and Turkey have all participated in similar drills. The prime minister added that they are solely for the sake of gaining combat experience to strengthen the country's defence capabilities.

Asked about Jordan's implementation of the U.N. embargo on Iraq, Dr. Majali replied that Jordan, being a U.N. member state, is perhaps the only country in the region that is fully committed to implementing the embargo because, he added, it cannot risk any violation that could entail dangers.

Dr. Majali said Jordan welcomes an Arab summit at any level for the sake of serving the national cause.

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what's going on

SEMINAR

* "Jordan in 1948 and Its Aftermath" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Sunday, May 24, at 9:00 p.m.

CONCERT

* Musical performance by students of Faza' for Music at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

ART EXHIBITION

* Exhibition of personal oil paintings of artist Mohammad Al Hadidi (at his residence), Dahiyat Al Rashid, near Dawahi Hotel (Tel. 5154567).

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Christian de Portzamparc at the University of Jordan, until June 4.

* Works by Mohammad Al Lahham at Al Madinah Gallery, Ras Al 'Ain (Tel. 743158), until May 23.

* Paintings by Abdul Aziz Al Hasak at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens St. (Tel. 5336098), until May 26.

* Spring collection of ceramic items and rugs at Beit Al Bawadi showroom, Abdoun (Tel. 5925841/5930070), until May 24.

* Photo exhibition "Frederico Garcia Lorca" and book exhibition "Lorca Translated Into Arabic" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman (Tel. 4610858), until May 25.

* "Sculpture Designs" by Jewellery Designer Suzanne El Masry and Sculptor Samer Tabba at the American Center, Abdoun, until May 25.

* Paintings by Lebanese-American artist Eiel Adnan entitled "Artist's Book of Art and Poetry" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Wehdeh, until May 28. Also displaying works by Berlin-based Syrian artist Marwan Bashi entitled "A Suite of Heads," and works by contemporary Arab artists.

Bromine deal with American firm not political — officials

(Continued from page 1)

an APC official told the Jordan Times that the Israeli company was informed of APC's dissatisfaction with their proposals, and as such should not be surprised. DSB and Jordan had signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) during the Amman Economic Summit in 1995. According to industry sources the MOU had long expired but the two sides continued negotiations.

According to industry sources, Israel's insistence on exclusivity for the life of the project and its failure to commit to expanding production capacity blocked an agreement with DSB. According to the initial agreement with Aljazeera, the firm has seven year exclusivity, where APC would not be allowed to build another bromine plant.

"The joint venture preserves our right to expand production capacity and it will bring in new technology," said an APC official explaining the commercial

reasons behind APC's choice of Albemarle over DSB.

APC officials said Albemarle and JODICO have 12 months to try to conclude a final accord, the same terms that were offered to DSB. If the two sides are successful, a joint Jordanian-U.S. firm with equal 50 per cent stakes would be set up to manage the project.

"It was a business decision," said a source involved in the negotiations with both the Americans and Israelis. "Jordan, over the life of the project, will be making more money in terms of dividends, income taxes, revenues from the sale of the brine from the Albemarle deal than with DSB."

The source noted that DSB was demanding over \$10 million for technical know-how. Albemarle is asking for only \$2.5 million.

The same American company, under the name of Ethyl, negotiated with APC between 1992 and 1994 over a similar bromine plant but failed to reach a deal.

He told the Jordan Times Friday evening that the reason he requested his client's release was because he was detained illegally.

"My client, who was

released on bail before his trial, was jailed without a written order from the State Security Court which [verbally] ordered his immediate detention," Mr. Mjalli, who is also the head of the Jordan Bar Association, said.

Last week, Mr. Shbeilat sent a letter to the Swaga prison director saying that he did not ask for a pardon and asking for the release of all prisoners who were included in a 1996 general amnesty.

King Hussein ordered Mr. Shbeilat's release during a surprise visit to the professional union's complex on Monday.

It was the third time King Hussein has pardoned Mr. Shbeilat, who was a member of Parliament between 1989 and 1993.

Mr. Shbeilat was sentenced to life in 1992 after being convicted by the State Security Court for treason and in 1994 after being convicted by the same court for lewd majesty.

The King told the press after meeting the presidents of the professional unions that "the Shbeilat affair is over, with his colleagues as guarantors for him."

In his letter, Mr. Shbeilat said he did not ask anyone to vouch for him to stop "my national activity," and added that "I have never previously asked anyone to pardon me for crimes which I do not admit to committing. I am only exercising my constitutional rights."

He added that an amnesty involving him would violate the constitution, since the verdict against him was not final because he was still appealing to the Court of Cassation.

But on Thursday and in response to Mr. Shbeilat's letter, the head of Professional Union Council, Hosni Abu Gheida, said the council "supported the request by Attorney Hussein Mjalli to release him."

Mr. Abu Gheida said Mr. Shbeilat's letter "doesn't concern the Professional Unions Council. It only represents Mr. Shbeilat's opinion, and he bears the responsibility for its contents in front of public opinion."

Mr. Shbeilat, 56, was detained by the authorities while on his way back from Ma'an on Feb. 20 after delivering a sermon at Ma'an mosque a day before pro-Iraq unrest broke out in the southern town.

One man was killed and dozens more were injured in the riots that ensued.

Pardon of Ma'an rioters closes chapter — deputy

(Continued from page 1)

"We believe that the Ma'an file is over and we hope the government will fulfil its promise to improve the economic infrastructure of the city," Mr. Hlalat said.

"We believe that the economic situation in Ma'an was responsible for the contempt among the residents and any move by the government in that direction will help calm down the situation," he added.

The deputy said that among the projects the government pledged to undertake in Ma'an were the Shedyiah Housing Compound, filter factory, a new university college and the agricultural projects which will create more jobs for the unemployed in the city.

Mr. Hlalat indicated that despite government promises and the decision to release all suspects, some people are still unhappy with

the government's "behaviour" following the unrest.

Meanwhile, State Security Court prosecutor Lieutenant Colonel Mahmood Obeidat has ordered the release of more than 80 people who were arrested for alleged involvement in a recent spate of bombings in Amman.

The daily Al Dustour Arabic daily quoted Col. Obeidat as saying that investigations have proved that these people were not involved in these bombings.

Tens of people were arrested following a series of explosions in Amman that targeted the car of former security official, a four-star hotel, the headquarters of the highway patrols and a school.

Earlier this month, the government said that eight people have allegedly admitted masterminding these explosions. It added that these

people were members of the "Reformation and Challenge" group which, according to the government, was receiving financial support and instructions from abroad.

On the other hand a spokesman of the Lower House's Public Freedom Committee urged the government to improve the conditions of the overcrowded Juweidah prison.

Deputy Mohammad Azyadeh, said that a delegation representing the committee has visited the prison and received complaints from the inmates.

He told the Jordan Times that the prison's facilities do not have a capacity for more than 900 but "at present, the jail has more than 1750 inmates."

"We have submitted a petition to the government to improve the prison's conditions or at least transfer the inmates to other jails," Mr. Azyadeh said.

German opposition party to challenge government on nuclear leaks

BONN (AFP) — The German parliament is to debate next week the issue of radiation leaks from nuclear waste shipment convoys amid an outcry over revelations of contamination.

Michael Mueller, the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) environment spokesman, Friday accused Environment Minister Angela Merkel of "negligence" and said the affair had "further diminished confidence in the government."

He said Ms. Merkel was guilty of "sloppiness and careless dealings" with dangerous materials.

The charges come at a bad time for Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who is struggling to counter low opinion poll ratings four months from national elections in

September.

Ms. Merkel Thursday stopped all transport of nuclear waste both in Germany and for German shipments abroad, following the revelation that convoys heading for France had leaked radiation. Such waste is transported almost daily within Germany.

One of the two big German police unions, the GdP, said Thursday its members did not want to escort future convoys.

In March, a cross-country shipment to Ahaus in the northwest triggered bitter and violent protests.

Parties from both Mr. Kohl's ruling coalition and the left-wing opposition have called for a debate at next Wednesday's session of the Bundestag, the lower house of parliament.

The debate is all but cer-

tain to take place as demands from two parties are enough for an item to be put on the Bundestag agenda.

The environment ministry said the contamination did not present a public health risk, but promised there would be no further convoys of combustible nuclear material within Germany or to reprocessing centres abroad until "appropriate measures" had been taken.

It cited in particular improved cleaning procedures before departure.

Convoys would only resume once the measures "provide assurances that such contamination will not take place again," the ministry said in a communiqué.

A ministry spokesman could not say how long the suspension would last, but insisted that no contamina-

tion had been detected on any convoys in Germany.

Mr. Mueller called for explanations of record levels of contamination, "up to 3,450 times over authorised norms."

Ms. Merkel had May 14 reported 11 cases of leaks out of 55 German convoys to France in 1997 and two in 1998.

Mr. Mueller's assistant Klaus Lennartz said he doubted Ms. Merkel's claims that she had not been told of the leaks until the end of April. He said Ms. Merkel should resign if it turned out that she knew there were radiation problems with the convoys since the mid-1980s.

Lennartz told the mass-circulation newspaper Express Friday that public safety "has been neglected for years in the name of eco-

nomics interests of the atomic lobby."

The Greens environmental party derided Ms. Merkel's claims as "highly unlikely."

"If the ministry was in effect unaware, then this would not be any less than scandalous. It would mean that Ms. Merkel's department has been fast asleep for the last 10 years," the party said in a statement Wednesday.

Ms. Merkel said Wednesday that the German nuclear industry and the French nuclear agency COGEMA failed to inform the government about radiation leaks in past convoys.

She said COGEMA, the company running the La Hague reprocessing plant, and the German nuclear industry had sat on the information since the 1980s.

German conservative party calls for reducing immigration

INGOLSTADT, Germany (AFP) — The German Christian Social Union (CSU), a key party in Chancellor Helmut Kohl's ruling coalition, is to push for a cutback in immigration at a congress here Friday.

The conservative, Bavaria-based CSU is expected to adopt a resolution entitled: "Germany and Bavaria are not lands of immigration."

The CSU platform worked out at the congress in the southern city of Ingolstadt Friday is to be integrated with the platform

of Mr. Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) approved Tuesday in the northern city of Bremen.

The CDU had called for a tougher line on immigration and domestic security.

Theo Waigel, German finance minister and president of the CSU, told reporters ahead of the opening of the congress here that immigration should be limited as it caused "fear" among Germans.

The CSU is to make cutting immigration and strengthening domestic security key themes in its campaign for Bavarian state

elections Sept. 13 and national elections Sept. 27.

The party has an absolute majority in the southern state of Bavaria.

CSU officials said after the strong showing of the far-right German Peoples Union (DVU) party in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt in April that it would harden its line on immigration and domestic security, to stop the DVU from taking away its supporters.

The CSU resolution here on domestic security is titled: "No tolerance for criminals."

Former SS officer candidate in national elections

MUNICH, Germany (AFP) — Former Nazi SS officer Franz Schoenhuber said here Friday he would be a candidate in German national elections in September.

Mr. Schoenhuber, 75, former head of the right-wing Republican party, told reporters in Munich that he would stand as an independent candidate affiliated with the list of the far right German Peoples Union

(DVU) party.

The DVU scored a shock result in a state ballot April 26 in Saxony-Anhalt when it won 12.9 per cent of the vote.

Mr. Schoenhuber said he would run probably in the southern state of Bavaria. He said he expected the DVU to get the 5 per cent of the vote needed nationwide to enter the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, in the Sept. 27 ballot.

Spanish Socialists in dock for 'dirty war' trial

MADRID (AFP) — Spain's former Socialist government goes in the dock next week, with the trial of a dozen people — including two ex-ministers — on charges of running state-sanctioned, anti-Basque hit squads.

The trial of the defendants for their alleged role in the "dirty war" against Basque separatists in the 1980s is scheduled to open before the Supreme Court Monday.

The campaign involved the self-styled Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL), which were allegedly funded by the government of former Premier Felipe Gonzalez to carry out a series of kidnappings and assassinations in the Basque country on both sides of the French and Spanish border between 1983 and 1987.

Most prominent among the defendants are former Interior Minister José Barrionuevo and former Security Minister Rafael Vera, who face prosecution demands for jail sentences of 23 years for membership of an armed group, illegal detention and embezzlement.

The other defendants are facing possible sentences of eight to 21 years.

The main charge against all the defendants pertains to the kidnapping in December 1983 on the French side of the border of Segundo Marey — a French citizen of Spanish origin, who was abducted by GAL after they mistook him for a leader of the armed Basque separatist group ETA.

The kidnapping of Marey, who was released after 10 days, marked the beginning of GAL operations, which swiftly multiplied and grew more vio-

lent with numerous cases of shooting and torture.

GAL was set up in response to a major ETA offensive and aimed at expanding anti-terrorist operations into the separatist group's bases in southwest France.

Monday's trial is only the beginning, with four other judicial investigations into GAL's activities expected to produce further arrests.

The extent of the GAL scandal came to light in 1994 and was a major factor in the socialist defeat in general elections two years later.

Even after the conservative Popular Party came to power, GAL continued to provide a major source of political tension, with the new government taking pains to lay all the blame on its predecessor.

The defendants have responded by saying that GAL was part of a political operation designed to discredit the socialist government at the time.

Top-ranking French and Spanish officials, including former Premier Gonzalez and current Deputy Prime Minister Francisco Alvarez Casco, have been called as witnesses for next week's trial.

Mr. Gonzalez Friday denounced the trial for being politically motivated and warned that it would only serve to "legitimise" ETA.

The trial is a "political issue disguised as a judicial affair," Mr. Gonzalez told reporters.

Compliance issues critical to greenhouse targets

SYDNEY (AFP) — Compliance issues remained the greatest challenge to implementing greenhouse gas restriction targets, the host of a climate policy conference said Friday.

Brian Fisher, executive director of conference organiser ABARE, Australia's major economic research agency, said a consensus had been reached that an emissions trading scheme was the best way to meet the Kyoto targets.

But he said there would

need to be a sensible monitoring and enforcement system in place on the scheme, where credits would be traded on financial markets.

The issue of compliance was one of the most pressing issues on the agenda, he said, because it was critical not just to emissions trading but to the protocol itself.

"It must be decided who would be liable for infringements of rules," he said, adding that no consensus on the issue had been reached in Sydney.

"It is a very difficult area

which is going to need a lot of debate at the international level to solve," he said.

The inaugural International Conference on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading here follows an agreement reached in Kyoto last year which committed developed countries to reducing their emissions by an average 5 per cent from 1990 levels by 2012.

The conference is one of many fora aiming to thrash out ways to implement the Kyoto protocol.

Tokyo, Seoul vow to stop Indian nuclear influence over N. Korea

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan and South Korea agreed Friday to prevent India's nuclear tests giving North Korea an excuse for its own nuclear arms development, a Japanese official said.

The agreement was reached when Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto met South Korean Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Park Chung-Soo for half an hour at his official residence, the foreign ministry official said.

Referring to India's underground nuclear tests last week, the prime minister asked Mr. Park for cooperation in preventing them from giving North Korea its cue, the official said.

"There is a need for us to express strong concern about this problem as not to motivate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)," Mr. Hashimoto was quoted as saying.

Mr. Park replied that the South Korean government was also "greatly concerned"

about the matter, the official said.

Under a 1994 agreement with the United States, North Korea has frozen its nuclear programme, suspected of being aimed at building nuclear weapons, in exchange for the supply of light-water nuclear reactors and heavy fuel.

The South Korean minister arrived here Thursday on a three-day visit partly aimed at paving the way for a visit here in October by South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung who took office last February.

The minister told Mr. Hashimoto that President Kim had a "strong determination" to make relations between the two neighbouring nations still closer, the foreign ministry official said.

The prime minister expressed hope that South Korea would accept Japan's offer of \$1 billion in loans from the Export-Import Bank to help cash-strapped South Korean manufacturers, the official said.

The offer was made

Thursday when Finance Minister Hikaru Matsunaga met the South Korean minister, in response to a request made by Seoul earlier this month for such loans.

Earlier Friday, Mr. Park called for Japanese investment to help revive the ailing South Korean economy when he met with Shoichiro Toyoda, chairman of Japan's Federation of Economic Organisations.

"South Korea is to improve the country's investment environment, we would like Japanese companies to support South Korea's recovery," Mr. Park told Mr. Toyoda, who is also chairman of Toyota Motor Corp.

"South Korea's recovery of power is helpful for the Japanese economy," the South Korean minister said.

Mr. Toyoda replied: "Japan and South Korea are in quite close relations. We want to cooperate as much as we can."



Environmentalists wearing protective clothing hold each other while sitting on a roof of the Slovak embassy in Vienna. About 25 activists from the Austrian environmental group Global 2000 entered the embassy in protest against plans by Slovakia to begin starting up the first reactor at the controversial Mochovce nuclear plant. The activists were detained by police (Reuters photo)

Nuclear protesters occupy Slovak embassy

VIENNA (AFP) — Environmental activists briefly occupied the Slovak embassy in Vienna Friday to protest the opening of a controversial nuclear power plant in Slovakia, a spokeswoman said.

Austrian police moved in about an hour after the activists occupied a first-floor room in the embassy to protest the imminent activation of the Mochovce plant, which has sparked widespread protests in Austria.

"But this does not mean we are going to leave. Our activists are still chained to the front door of the embassy, and we will stay here as long as we can," Patricia Lorenz of the group

Global 2000 told AFP from outside the embassy.

In all some 20 militants were involved in the action over the Mochovce plant, including some six who occupied a room after "simply walking in the front door," the spokeswoman said.

The protesters hung a banner reading "Stop Mochovce Now" from the front of the embassy, while other activists wore protection suits and gas masks to symbolise their fears over the plant.

Police withdrew the banner as they arrested those inside. The occupation had begun at about 9:30 a.m. (0730 GMT) and police moved in shortly after 10:30

a.m. (0830 GMT).

The action was designed to press Slovak premier Vladimir Meciar to pledge not to activate the Mochovce plant until international inspectors had been satisfied it is safe.

"The Slovak government has so far ignored all warnings about an over-hasty activation of the plant, and has even ignored an official protest from Austria," said Global 2000 spokesman Lothar Lockl.

Austrian Chancellor Viktor Klima personally appealed to Meciar to delay the activation of the plant, 180 km east of Vienna, after inspectors said it should not be allowed to go into operation in its present state.

CFE talks still on track despite Russian problems

VIENNA (AFP) — Talks on updating the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty can still be completed by an informal agreed deadline next year despite Russian problems, a senior diplomat said Friday.

The diplomat admitted that obstacles remain to revising the CFE before NATO's scheduled enlargement next April — but denied a report that a new Russian proposal had reduced the talks to "a stalemate."

"I think that's over-dramatising," said the diplomat, close to the Vienna-based CFE revision talks.

"We can still get there, although we're not going to get there and give both sides what they want... If we get some compromise on what everybody wants, yes we can

get an adapted treaty by next April," he told AFP.

The CFE treaty was agreed after the end of the cold war to limit the deployment of non-nuclear forces in Europe — specifically in the so-called flank zones along the borders of the former Soviet Union.

Talks on updating it — to reflect changes in the region, notably NATO's imminent expansion to include ex-Soviet satellites Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic — have been going on for the last two years in Vienna.

The diplomat specifically denied a report in the U.S. journal Defence News that the talks have been "thrown into turmoil" by a Russian proposal to exempt some equipment from the strict lim-

its set out in the CFE.

The journal said Moscow had proposed that it be allowed to transfer weaponry from its flank region to two bases in northwestern Russia for repair — and that while they are there they be exempted from CFE limits.

The diplomat, who requested anonymity, said CFE partners were divided over the proposal, with some against, but insisted it was not a major obstacle.

"I think there are bigger problems. Such as longstanding objectives for what an adapted treaty should do."

"Russia wants its concerns taken into account, and its concerns are that it is at an increasing disadvantage with respect to its Western neighbours," he said.

Kosovo Albanians, Serb officials open landmark talks

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — The Serb government and representatives of the Albanian majority in Kosovo opened landmark talks here Friday on the future of the troubled Serbian province.

The talks, the format for which was agreed at a meeting between Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and Yugoslav President

Milosevic, were delayed after fog prevented the Serb delegation from arriving at the Kosovo capital Pristina.

Christopher Hill, the U.S. ambassador in Macedonia, was attending the meeting held at the seat of the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK), the main Albanian party in the province.

The agreement to hold weekly talks on the future of the province, where the 90-

per cent ethnic Albanian population is seeking independence from Serb rule, came about following U.S. diplomatic pressure.

Since March, Kosovo has descended into a near-warlike situation with armed ethnic Albanian groups controlling parts of the province, where around 160 people have died since a Serb police crackdown in late February.

Floods kill 19 in north China

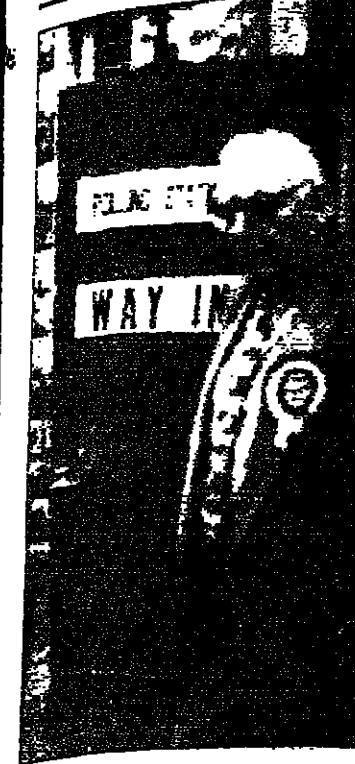
BEIJING (R) — Floods caused by torrential rains have killed 19 people and injured 24 in China's northwestern province of Gansu, a local official said Friday.

This latest count brought the death toll from floods to 50 this year.

Water inundated five cities in Gansu Wednesday, including the provincial capital Lanzhou,

toppling 1,257 houses and damaging 5,520 hectares of spring wheat and other cash crops, a provincial flood prevention official said.

He declined to give an estimate of damage to property, but said flooding hit 80,320 metres of irrigation facilities, as well as 15 km of highway.



Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Ian Paisley, at a polling station after voting in the landmark referendum on whether to remain in the United Kingdom (Reuters photo)

Result in peace vote

BELFAST (AFP) — When the final ballot papers are counted in Northern Ireland's peace referendum, the result is expected to be a narrow victory for the "Yes" vote.

Protestant unionists voted in favour of the peace deal. Unless a good majority of the community backs the agreement, headline five-point might pass through the Belfast assembly due to be elected on June 25 to subvert the settlement.

The problem is that votes will not be broken down along religious lines between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists, and even on a regional basis, as the only guide will be the overall result.

Student killed in school shooting

BRINGFIELD, Oregon (AFP) — In a scene becoming horrifyingly frequent, a 16-year-old student opened fire with a semi-automatic weapon in a high school hallway, killing one person and injuring more than 20.

Kip Kinkel, his face smeared with blood, was taken away by police from the cafeteria where he began shooting at about 300 terrified students.

Kinkel had finished firing his one weapon and was reaching for another when he was tackled by one of the school's top wrestlers who had been injured. At that point several other students jumped on Kinkel to subdue him.

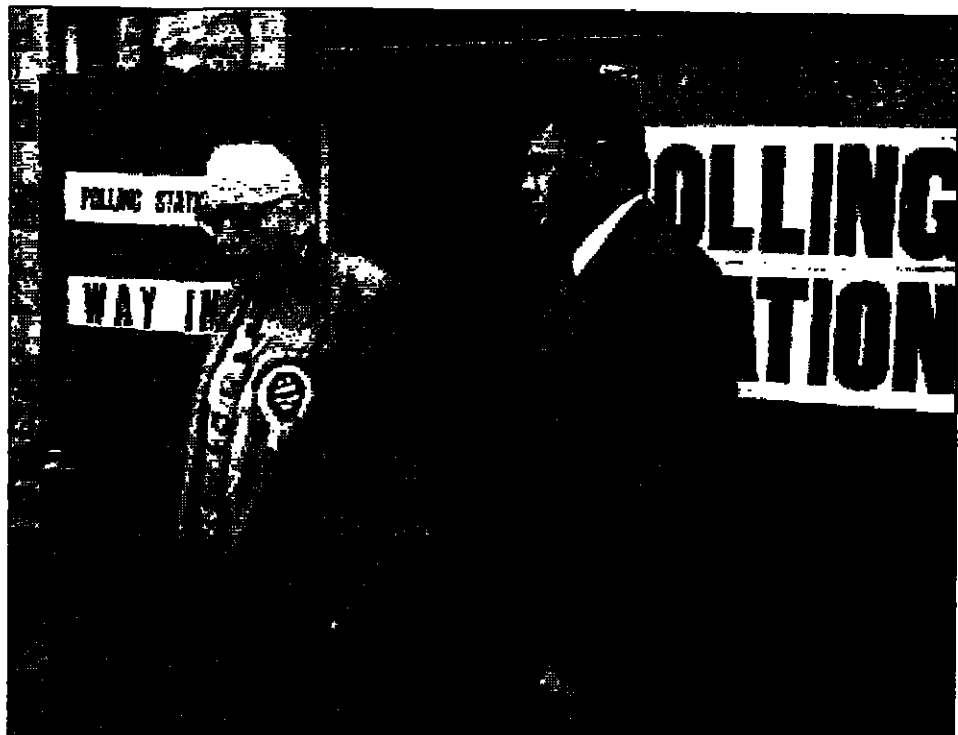
He looked at us and said, 'I'll kill me. Kill me.' One of the students helped to wrestle Kinkel down and seize his weapons, told a local television station. Police went to Kinkel's home and found a man and woman premeditated to be his parents.

Kinkel's grandmother told the New York Times that his parents were murdered.

"Kip is my grandson — I murdered his mother and father," Katie Kinkel told the New York Times. When asked if she was certain, Kinkel replied: "For

me, it's dusk settled in this town of about 10,000 residents, fearful of signs and banners that they were about to be killed," read the drawings of Jesus Christ and the American flag at the school that was cordoned off by police as a

crime scene. Kinkel is 17 years old. The high school is in Springfield, Oregon. Kinkel's mother was a nurse and his father was a welder. Kinkel's mother was a nurse and his father was a welder. Kinkel's mother was a nurse and his father was a welder.



Leader of the Democratic Unionists Party the Reverend Ian Paisley (left) leaves a polling station after voting in the Irish referendum in central Belfast. Rev. Paisley voted 'No' in the landmark referendum which could help decide the fate of the province (Reuters photo)

Result in Northern Ireland peace vote difficult to read

BELFAST (AFP) — When the final ballot papers are counted in Northern Ireland's peace referendum and the result is announced Saturday, it will be a hard task to assess how many Protestant unionists voted in favour of the peace deal.

Unless a good majority of this community backs the agreement, hardline Protestants might gain enough seats in the semi-autonomous Belfast assembly due to be elected on June 25 to sabotage the settlement.

The problem is that votes will not be broken down across religious lines between Protestant unionists and Catholic republicans, or even on a regional basis, so the only guide will be the overall result.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and David Trimble, moderate leader of the Ulster Unionists, the province's largest party, have both set a target of 70 per cent for a convincing

endorsement.

If it is somewhat less than that, given that Catholics have indicated in polls that they intend to vote overwhelmingly 'yes', it would likely mean that only a slim majority of Protestants had backed the agreement.

Protestants account for 54 per cent of the population and Catholics 43 per cent.

Opponents to the agreement, led by the fundamentalist Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionists (DUP), have claimed unrealistically that a 26 per cent 'no' vote would mean that a majority of unionists reject the accord.

But a 'yes' vote below 60 per cent would probably precipitate a leadership crisis for Mr. Trimble, as it would indicate that only a minority of Protestants were in favour of the peace settlement.

The other important guide will be the turnout. Around 1.2 million people

are eligible to vote, and up to 80 per cent or more were expected to go to the polling booths, much higher than during general elections.

The greater the turnout, the Ulster Unionists believe, the more likely that the sizeable section of 'don't knows' (a third of Protestants) has come out in favour of a 'yes'.

Critical to this are the young first time voters — the electorate whose support Mr. Trimble sought to attract by appearing on stage together with John Hume, leader of the large moderate Catholic nationalist SDLP party, at a rock concert Tuesday featuring the Irish rock group U2.

Irish state broadcaster RTE was to conduct an exit poll late Friday, but the practice is almost unknown in Northern Ireland, where commentators consider it unreliable because voters are reluctant to reveal their political views.

Student kills 1, wounds 8 in school shooting spree

SPRINGFIELD, Oregon (AFP) — In a scene becoming horrifyingly frequent, a 15-year-old student opened fire with a semi-automatic weapon in a high school Thursday killing one person and injuring more than 20.

Kip Kinkel, his face smeared with blood, was led away by police from the cafeteria where he began shooting as about 300 terrified Thurston High School students scrambled for cover. He was to be arraigned Friday.

Kinkel had finished firing off one weapon and was reaching for another when he was tackled by one of the school's top wrestlers who had been injured. At that point several other students jumped on Kinkel to subdue him.

"He looked at us and said, 'Just kill me. Kill me now,'" one of the students who helped to wrestle Kinkel down and seize his weapons told a local television station. Police went to Kinkel's home and found a slain man and woman presumed to be his parents. Kinkel's grandmother told The New York Times that both parents were murdered.

"Kip is my grandson — he murdered his mother and father," Katie Kinkel told the New York Times. When asked if she was certain, Mrs. Kinkel replied: "For sure."

As dusk settled in this stunned city of about 50,000 residents, tearful students arrived at the high school with signs and bearing flowers that they interwove into the school fence. "Stop the killing," read one sign. Drawings of Jesus Christ were also hung alongside American flags at the school that was cordoned off by police as a



Fifteen-year-old Kipland Kinkel is shown here in a 1997 Thurston Middle School yearbook photograph (Reuters photo)

crime scene. Volunteer counsellors also arrived to help grieving students.

The high school was to be closed Friday, though counsellors would be on hand at the Springfield middle school to assist students who need emotional support in dealing with the incident.

Kinkel did not appear to have any specific targets, and under Oregon law he will likely be tried as an adult but will not face the death penalty, said local prosecutor Doug Harper.

Kinkel entered the school armed with a .22 calibre pistol and an Austrian-made Glock pistol, and used at least two of them, police spokesman Jerry Smith said.

"He was very calm" at the time of his arrest, Mr.

Smith said. "His motives, what caused him to go in there, we still have a long way to go... my understanding is there was a history of violent acts."

As news reports about the shooting hit the airwaves, worried and weeping parents flocked to the school waiting anxiously for school officials to read the names of students who were injured. As of nearly midnight Thursday, 23 people were taken to two local hospitals with four of them listed in critical condition, four others in serious condition and the rest in fair to good condition, a city hall spokeswoman said.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton said: "I know that all Americans are heartbroken" by the shooting at the school attended by some 1,700 students.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the people who were killed and wounded and with that entire fine community," he said.

The shooting came just two months after two young boys ambushed classmates in Jonesboro, Arkansas, killing one teacher and four students.

The string of school shootings is "the inevitable result when you have a mix of kids and guns," said Josh Sugarman of the Washington-based Violence Policy Centre, which lobbies for stronger gun controls.

"This is becoming more and more common," he said. "We see more and more kids using guns to resolve conflicts, whether it's in school or in the streets."

Since February 1997, there have been eight shootings at schools around the country that have left 16 people dead.

Angry Russian miners jeer deputy premier

PROKOPYEVSK, Russia (AFP) — Russian Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Sytyev flew into the Siberian mining town of Prokopyevsk Friday to jeers and insults from angry miners and their families as the government struggled to defuse a deepening miners' wage arrears crisis.

President Boris Yeltsin meanwhile warned the striking miners that their industrial action had gone too far and was threatening to drain the country's resources.

The week-old strike in the Kuzbass coal region had "breached acceptable limits," Mr. Yeltsin said in a weekly radio address.

He also ruled out any possibility of the government printing money to meet the miners' wage arrears, that totalled 3.7 billion rubles (\$600 million) by May 1.

Mr. Sytyev, who arrived in Prokopyevsk three hours later than planned, missed a mass rally attended by around 2,500 people in the town's central Miners' Square.

But a crowd of several hundred locals denounced the Moscow authorities, shouting "Shame on the president," "Alcoholics" and "Thieves."

The strike movement began a week ago when miners blocked trains on the main trans-Siberian line at Anzhero-Sudzhensk, north of the regional capital Kemerovo.

Thursday miners moved to

block a branchline the authorities had used overnight to sneak 17 freight and passenger trains into the strikebound region, cutting off food and raw material shipments to the east of the country.

The Kemerovo authorities, who declared a state of emergency Wednesday to protect vital supplies, said the blockade was hitting grain and fuel supplies but that the region had enough basic foodstuffs to last around two months.

According to ITAR-TASS, Mr. Sytyev ordered the authorities to open up emergency food reserves to help families who had not received the child benefits owed to them.

Speaking on the steps of a local administration building in Prokopyevsk, Mr. Sytyev said: "I know how you live" — a comment greeted by howls of derision from the crowd.

"We will go through the demands of the miners point by point, step by step," he said amid sustained heckling before entering the building.

During the meeting, attended by Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleyev and deputy oil and Energy Minister Igor Kozhukhovskiy, he told miners' leaders and coal industry bosses that the government "understood that if today we don't speak about the future (of the coal industry) we'll be back here again in three weeks' time."

"We need to heroically put out the fire. We need to solve the problems not just in Prokopyevsk but in the other regions as well," Mr. Sytyev said.

Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko however has given Mr. Sytyev little ammunition, pledging in a tough financial plan unveiled Thursday to reassure plunging markets that the government could not afford to bust the budget for the sake of the miners.

"We do not have the right to concede and resort to handing out additional money in connection with the protest action or the demands of this or that group of Russian citizens," Mr. Kiriyenko warned.

The deepening crisis is a major test for Mr. Kiriyenko, who promised on assuming the premiership in April to tackle Russia's chronic wage arrears problem head on.

However, woeful tax receipts and the need to defend the vulnerable ruble with fiscal rigour have removed the room for manoeuvre.

Even if it pays off the miners, the government will need millions of dollars to restructure an outdated and inefficient industry, and will still have to grasp the nettle of closing loss-making pits and finding new jobs for a host of single industry pit towns.

Clashes between troops and rebels kill dozens in east Congo

KINSHASA (AFP) — Government troops clashed with rebels in a firefight that claimed dozens of lives, including that of a Belgian, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a diplomatic source here said.

The report in Kinshasa confirmed a statement from Belgium's embassy in Rwanda, which said that at least 30 people died last weekend, among them a Belgian, in violence in the Goma region across the border from Rwanda.

The source in Kinshasa said a battle broke out Sunday between the Congolese Armed Forces and an unidentified rebel group near Goma on the road from neighbouring Butembo.

The Belgian was named as 24-year-old David Defleur, who was said to have been visiting Goma from the Ugandan capital Kampala. He was reportedly shot, but no further details were available.

In its separate report, Brussels' embassy in Kigali Friday said at least 30 people were killed in the incident in the Goma region, including a Belgian national.

The Belgian mission in Rwanda said the fighting took place Saturday and that almost all of the victims were thought to be local Congo people.

In Kinshasa, a source said the rebels may have been members of Rwanda's Hutu extremist Interahamwe militia, who were routed from

their own country with ex-government troops in 1994, and have since been fighting the mainly Tutsi government installed in Kigali that year.

The region around Goma, the town from where current DRC President Laurent Kabila launched the uprising that swept across the former Zaïre to topple Mobutu Sese Seko's regime last May, has seen mounting insecurity in recent months.

The area is a hotbed of activity by rival ethnic and military movements, including local tribes and Congo soldiers, as well as rebels from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi all fighting their own governments.

Taleban launch heavy attack north of Afghan capital

KABUL (AFP) — Two fierce attacks were launched by Taleban forces early Friday against their ex-government rivals north of the Afghan capital but in the heaviest clash for months the militia made no gains, witnesses said.

Opposition troops responded to the dawn attacks with a series of retaliatory rocket strikes on militia-held Kabul's airport, with the incoming missiles and distant exploding artillery awakening the city.

Travellers arriving in the city from the battle area only 25 kilometres north of here said the headline Taleban launched attacks at around 5:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. local time (0030 and 0230 GMT) on the village of Guldara.

"The Taleban attacked Guldara twice from the direction of the main road but they failed to advance and I've seen a lot of injured being driven back from the frontlines," a one-legged villager explained.

Travellers described the morning's battle as the heaviest fighting since anti-Taleban troops loyal to topgun Ahmad Shah Masood advanced in the plains north of the capital in July last year.

Since then successive Taleban assaults have failed to dislodge their stubborn ex-government rivals from the fertile valley.

Journalists were prevented by a Taleban checkpoint from exiting Kabul and travelling towards the front, which has

been locked in stalemate between the two farming districts of Shaka Dara and Guldara for more than nine months.

A spokesman for Mr. Masood told AFP in a telephone interview the Taleban had left behind 25 bodies on the front after the first attack, and launched their second offensive to recover the dead.

No independent confirmation of casualties was immediately available.

"It was a very strong attack that lasted two hours with the backing of jets, but the locals put up a strong resistance because they have twice tasted Taleban rule before," Abdullah said.

Abdullah said Mr. Masood's forces had responded with rocket fire at the city airport. By the early afternoon seven had struck areas inside and around the huge complex sending towering plumes of dust and smoke into the clear blue sky.

Inhabitants close to the sweeping complex said five of the rockets hit the airport while two others overshot the southern perimeter landing in a housing estate leaving five civilians lightly injured by flying glass.

The upsurge in fighting comes after a marked improvement in weather and a breakdown in talks between the Taleban and their opponents early this month.

Abdullah said the latest

Taleban attack signalled a de facto end to peace hopes, with the current regional climate failing to aid efforts to end the 18-year-old civil war.

"By renaming Afghanistan as an emirate and with their leader calling himself the Amir-ul-Mo'meen (leader of the faithful), they had already closed all the doors to talks," Abdullah complained.

He said that with Pakistan occupied by Indian nuclear tests, they were too busy to exert the necessary pressure on the Taleban to return to negotiations.

"Now the Taleban have been left in the unfortunate and misguided belief that they can rule not only Afghanistan but all the Muslim World," he added.

The Taleban hold around two-thirds of Afghanistan including the capital Kabul which they seized in September 1996, and have imposed what they say is the world's purest Islamic state on areas under their control.

The anti-Taleban alliance includes a collection of former arch-enemies, which came together when the Taleban attempted to extend their control into northern Afghanistan. It includes the ex-government of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and topgun Mr. Masood, ex-Communist and ethnic-Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam and the Shiite-Muslim Hezb-i-Wahdat.

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Reflecting the Change

books taken 27 years, but it is to be taken as part of the sequel to *The Female Eunuch*. It was announced recently that Germaine Greer has received an advance for the book she never began to write: the *Eunuch's* "sequel" called *The Whole Woman*. Of course we've heard her views of feminism, art and her acerbic witlessness on television. The *Late Show*, and the memoir of her father, *Daddy Warbucks*, knew you. But *Whole* will see a return of Greer doing what she does best: a feminist polemic on the brutal side — she sees them, of women's bodies.

While the art is still alive with discussion about the new, minuscule-style feminism, what relevance can the most militant feminist of the sixties have? And has Germaine Greer any right to say to the women who are angry enough to be her grandmother? The early thoughts for Greer's new book were laid out in a speech she gave at Melbourne Book Festival last year. One of her theses is that women's bodies are still a battleground, that though she and other seventh-century feminists have fought for women to be able to have sex freely and without shame, nine centuries women feel they're accountable if they don't have sex.

In fact, women had the right to say "without apology," she said. "What I didn't have was the right to say yes. They have a duty to say yes to what their partners, my desire, no holds barred. Women cannot admit to feeling obliged or to not enjoying the stuff that's going on — not if they want to avoid, even if they have to take new-fangled art, to do it.

She claims that sex has been both elevated, so that it has greater importance than anything else, and emptied of meaning, and she claims that female genitalia, such as the womb and ovaries, have come to be seen as irrelevant. "The once women were both reproductive organs and reproductive," she writes. "They may now be specifically female organs and specifically female functions. The female clitoris was nothing but a woman's clitoris." The 1971 woman clitoris has no place.

Greer says, men who believe in women trapped in men's bodies are on breasts and a cleft and thus female. "Motherhood is not a breast, and the breast has ceased to be a 'good-giver' and has instead become an 'empty, leechy'."

Iran becomes model for population control

By Robin Wright

TEHRAN — Jalal Shahpasand, a tall, husky restaurateur, waited until after dinner and the chaperons had gone off to watch television.

After courting "the lovely Jila" for a year, he was ready. So he took her hand and softly asked, "Will you marry me?"

Jila nodded.

Javad Goudarzi, a plastics worker, chose the traditional route to marriage: family arrangement.

When he met 19-year-old Theahereh the first time, he decided that she was the girl for him. A week later, the proposal was relayed from his parents to her aunt and then to Theahereh. Back through the same route, she accepted.

And so the two couples ended up in a whitewashed health-clinic classroom last week, waiting for something even more important in Iran than a marriage licence — a slip certifying that they had passed the nation's family planning course.

No one gets married without it.

The course is just one aspect of an ambitious campaign to stop what had become one of the world's biggest population surges — one that had almost doubled the number of Iranians since the 1979 Islamic Revolution from 34 million to 63 million today.

The numbers shot up after the new religious government in the late '70s urged Iranian women to breed an Islamic generation. Aided by a lowering of the marriage age to 9, they more than doubled.

By the early 1980s, the population growth rate had reached 3.2 per cent, according to Iran's Health Ministry. International agencies pegged the rate at up to 3.9 per cent, among the world's highest.

Either way, the government — aware of the costs of such a large population — is spending millions of dollars a generation later to reverse the trend.

It seems to be working.

When the instructor asked how many children each couple plans to have, Jalal and Jila, who together

have seven siblings, said, "One."

Javad and Theahereh, who have 13 siblings, said, "Two."

Nationwide, the population growth rate is now down to 1.41 per cent, Iran says. And the fertility rate has dropped to such a staggering number that wary demographic experts are helping to expand the data base and sampling techniques.

Nonetheless, Iran's campaign has won worldwide praise. Population groups cite it as a model for developing nations and the Islamic bloc.

And Washington-based Population Action International bestowed its highest commendation on Iran's programme.

Its strength may be its imaginative initiatives.

Abbas Farsi, a truck driver with the first strands of silver in his hair, showed up early at the No-Scalpel Vasectomy clinic in south Tehran last week for the 10-minute procedure — and the 30-minute video showing a vasectomy and answering the most-asked questions, plus personal counselling.

"We have two children, and we want to give them a good education, so it was time to make sure we didn't have any more," he said.

Farsi's procedure was one of about 3,500 each year at the facility, which in turn is one of dozens of permanent and mobile clinics in Iran. All are free.

From Norplant to condoms,

The ruling clerics have even issued "farwas," or religious edicts, approving it.

The family planning programme, often referred to as Tehran's "other revolution," coincided with the end of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and with broader societal openings as the revolution began to settle down.

It also represented a new streak of pragmatism among the country's Shiite Muslim clergy.

Aware that even with its oil wealth Iran would soon not be able to feed, clothe, house, educate and employ the burgeoning numbers, religious leaders, health experts, government officials and academics held a summit to figure out what to do.

Simply providing birth control was not enough, they agreed.

By 1990, the Fertility Regulation Council was established. By 1993, new laws withdrew food coupons and subsidised health insurance after the third child. And then came the array of programmes which, unlike India's sometimes coercive tactics, are user-friendly, outside experts say.

The two-hour pre-nuptial class was one of the first steps in 1994.

"At first we used the trick of requiring couples to take the course," said Safieh Shahrari, a woman gynaecologist and senior family planning expert in the Health Ministry. "But after a year or two, we found most couples wanted to take the course. It's a place to ask questions at exactly the time they need answers."

In the clinic classroom, instructor Abol Faz Mohajeri offered no non-sensical guidance.

"What's the goal of getting married?" he asked the betrothed couples.

The answers varied from having an independent life and completing the human experience to fulfilling the Prophet Mohammad's message.

"Yes," said Mohajeri, adding what the others won't say: "But it's also about having regular sex."

"He then explained the various environmental consequences of overpopulation and did an explicit show-and-tell of birth-control devices.



Iranian youngsters play in Chitgar Park, Tehran, under a large billboard promoting the observance of strict Islamic dress and behaviour (photo by AP)

"And what do you want from God?" he continued. Jila responded that she wants healthy children.

"Yes, that's right. It's not important whether it's a boy or girl," he offered.

Iran's programme has emphasised gender equality to prevent the problem of male preference found elsewhere in Asia.

Despite Iran's marriage age, which family planning experts here want to return to 15, the programme also stresses that pregnancy before age 20 is not recommended. An accompanying pamphlet shows caricatures of a young teenager and an old woman at full term.

To reach workers, who have the lowest participation in family planning, the Islamic Republic has set up education workshops in factory health rooms, which are also distribution centres for free contraceptives.

Nationwide, Iran holds its annual Population Week, which coincides with the U.N.-designated Population Day on July 11. All segments of society are engaged.

"We ask religious leaders to tell people when they are praying about the effectiveness of population control in dealing with social and economic development," Shahrari said. "Other Islamic countries are often surprised at how the religious leaders support us."

During the week, elementary through high schools focus on population issues in environmental classes developed jointly by the Health and Education ministries. To encourage media coverage, Iran's programme offers free trips for the largely Tehran-based media to Isfahan and Shiraz, the historic centres of famed Iranian poetry, art and architecture, to cover family planning activities.

Year-round, Iran also recruits women volunteers who act as neighbourhood advisers about family health and planning techniques.

"If neighbours are just starting a new life, a volunteer tells them about nutrition, cancer screening and care. For a family with four children, she might tell them about vasectomy and the benefits of population control," Shahrari added.

To reach remote mountain villages and rural tribal areas, Iran has 80 mobile teams, which have evolved from health workers who consulted on contraceptives to medical units — surgeons, anaesthesiologists, lab technicians and nurses — that now travel by four-wheel drive vehicles or helicopters to perform vasectomies or tubal ligation.

As a Muslim country, Iran has had some unusual problems to

deal with along the way.

"Norplant, for example, can cause some bleeding, and Muslim women can't pray when they're bleeding. So people don't like it," Shahrari noted.

And the system still has serious glitches.

Despite pervasive family planning options, about 33 per cent of pregnancies are still unwanted by one or both partners, a recent government survey shows. And among unwanted pregnancies, 35 per cent of the women take oral contraceptives, indicating that they are misused or not understood.

But even success does not eliminate the dangers. Even if the government meets its objectives, Iran's population is still projected to reach 90 million in less than 25 years.

— The Los Angeles Times

Look forward in anger

By Katherine Viner

IT HAS taken 27 years, but it looks like we've got it: the sequel to *The Female Eunuch*. It was announced recently that Germaine Greer has received an \$800,000 advance for the book she never thought she'd write: the *Eunuch's* follow-up, called *The Whole Woman*. Of late, we've heard her views of contemporary arts and her acerbic wit on BBC television's *The Late Show*, and read her memoir of her father, *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*. But 1999 will see the return of Greer doing what she does best: a feminist polemic on the brutal truths, as she sees them, of women's lives today.

But while the air is still alive with discussions about the new, nineties-style feminism, what relevance can the most important feminist of the seventies have today? And has Germaine Greer anything to say to the women who are young enough to be her grandchildren?

The early thoughts for Greer's new book were laid out in a speech she gave at the Melbourne Book Festival last year.

The crux of her thesis is that women's sexuality is still a battleground; that although she and other seventies feminists may have fought for women to be able to have sex freely and without shame, nineties women feel they're unacceptable if they don't have sex.

"In 1968, women had the right to say no, without apology," she said. "What they didn't have was the right to say yes. Now they have a duty to say yes to whatever their partners may desire, no holds are barred. Women cannot admit to feeling disgust or to not enjoying the stuff that is going on — not if they want to seem cool, even if they have to take muscle relaxants to do it."

She claims that sex has been both elevated, so that it has greater importance than anything else, and emptied of meaning, and she claims that female attributes such as the womb and ovaries have come to be seen as irrelevant extras. "Where once women were nothing but reproductive organs and reproductive functions explained most of their behaviours," she writes, "they may now claim no specifically female organs and no specifically female functions. The 1969 female eunuch was nothing but a womb; the 1997 woman eunuch has no womb."

Thus, Greer says, men who believe they are women trapped in men's bodies are given breasts and a cleft and thus become "female"; motherhood is not venerated; and the breast has ceased to be a "food-giver" and has instead become an "erotic fetish."

To remind us that some things don't change, Greer reasserts that our culture's dependence on penetration — away from "necking, petting, foreplay by whatever name" — helps to keep women submissive, which is why "the majority of men... refuse to allow their body's outline to be breached." She says that, for men, even a doctor's probe is too much of a violation. "The penetrator, regardless of sex, cannot rule, OK? The person on the receiving end is fucked, finished, unserviceable, degraded."

Her comments, which will form the starting point for her new book, are both radical and up-to-date, and suggest that *The Whole Woman* will be not a rehash of *The Female Eunuch* but an important new polemic in its own right. Her book is being eagerly looked forward to as a radical, challenging voice — a relief in a world where placating men seems more important than anything else. If Greer's ideas could make the kind of splash today that they did in 1971, we are in for exciting times.

She is dismissive about the so-called new feminism in Britain. "Life is more difficult than these new feminists suggest," she says. "We're not all young career girls who are pleased to wear little strappy sandals." In a review of Natasha Walter's book *The New Feminism* in the *Times Educational Supplement*, Greer wrote: "Walter's book seems above all to reassure the faint-hearted that there is nothing to fear from feminism. If the next generation of feminists adopts her brand of unenlightened complacency, there will be nothing to hope for either."

Walter, meanwhile, thinks Greer is mistaken: that the world for women has changed for the better, not the worse. "Women's lives simply aren't the same any more, and that's partly because of *The Female Eunuch*," she says. "But I think Greer is coming from the perspective of someone who's lived through the sixties, seventies and eighties, and she was hoping for a big revolution that didn't happen. Whereas we can say as young women that it is possible to be optimistic. In a way, *The Female Eunuch* was a very young woman's book, in that it put the enjoyment of sexuality centre stage. Perhaps Greer is writing from a different perspective now and maybe she considers that the enjoyment of sex isn't as relevant today."

Walter also believes that Greer's focus on sex and the body is no longer as relevant as she suggests. "The personal and the political are not identical any more, and the site of action is out there in the public sphere, trying to get political and

economic equality."

When *The Female Eunuch* was published in 1971, the idea that the personal is political — that what we do in our personal lives is governed, or at least influenced, by political factors — was largely unheard of. It is impossible to overestimate the impact the book had, and indeed still has — it has sold a million copies worldwide, been translated into more than 12 languages and never been out of print.

"The *Female Eunuch* had a widespread influence — especially on people who were not already involved in radical politics," says Sheila Rowbotham, veteran of seventies feminism and most recently author of *A Century Of Women*. "It took the ideas of women having a different destiny as something, that could get women involved."

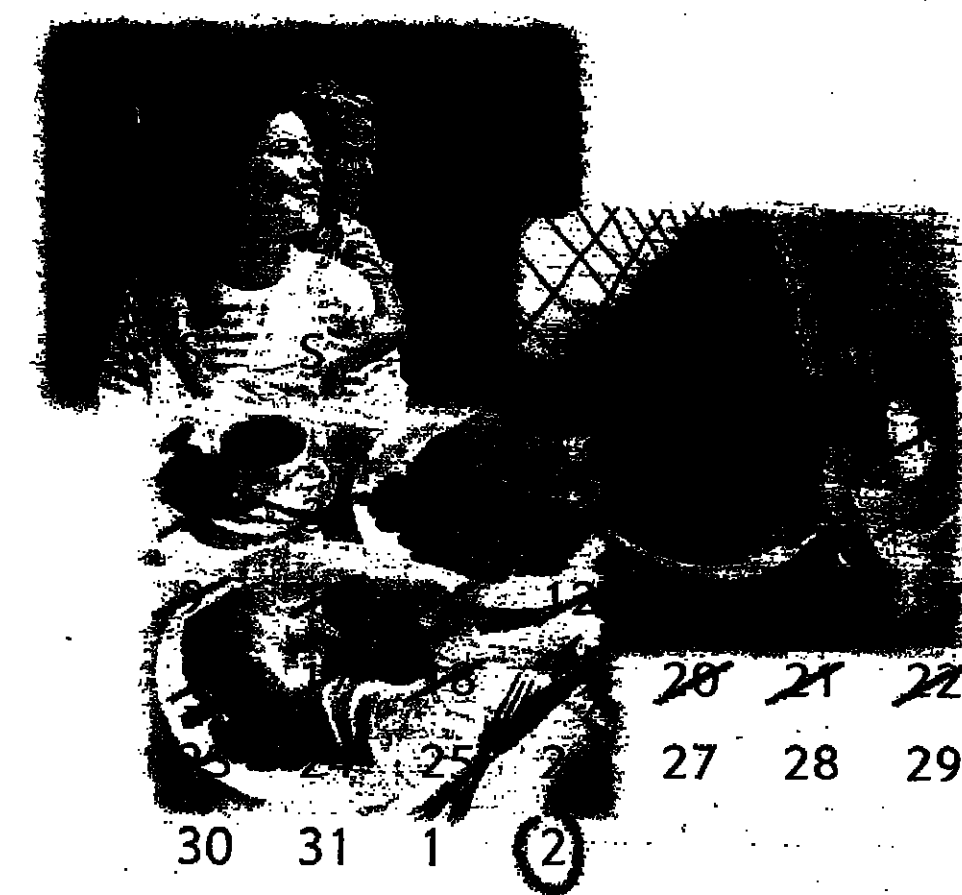
However, Rowbotham believes Greer's current line on sexuality — that where once women could not say yes, today they cannot say no — is in part due to Greer's own influence. "The women's movement as a whole was always rather worried about Germaine's stress on sex in any circumstances," she says.

Controversy seems to follow Greer — be it spats with fellow feminists or inviting the homeless into her home — but that's largely because she is so uncensorious of her own words. The bottom line is that when she speaks, people listen; and she speaks with a ferocity often lost from contemporary feminism.

Ann Oakley, who most recently co-edited *Who's Afraid Of Feminism?*, believes that we are in a phase of reevaluation of what has happened to women since the sixties. "There seems to be a whole new wave of feminism looking at the backlash and looking at where women have got to. I think Greer's book is part of that. Her original book was extremely important, and I think it's a very good thing that she's following it up."

Greer, meanwhile, is putting passion into this project. "I spent six weeks solid just writing, getting up in the middle of the night," she says. "It was exhausting. I think that really good writing, especially political writing, is done fast, so that you've got to jump up and run around in tears, so that it provokes energy." In other people as well as herself? "Well, I must be going through this for something," she says. "I want the book to be white hot and tense and quivering."

Will this be the defining feminist text of the nineties as *The Female Eunuch* was of the seventies? There's a year to wait to find out.



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Jordan to join WTO by mid-1999

By Ghaila Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan hopes to join the 132-member World Trade Organisation (WTO) by mid 1999 after it introduces a new package of economic legislation — a prerequisite for accession to the Geneva-based organisation. Minister of Industry and Trade Hani Mulki has said.

The Minister was speaking to reporters after his return from the 12th WTO ministerial conference which addressed the organisation's future agenda and commemorated the anniversary of the establishment of the multilateral trade system (or the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in Switzerland.)

Al Rai Arabic daily quoted Dr. Mulki as saying that if the necessary laws were not introduced by mid next year, Jordan's accession to the WTO will be delayed until the year 2002.

In an unprecedented step, Arab countries — currently negotiating accession to the WTO — submitted a statement to the conference urging the organisation to grant them treatment no less favourable than that accorded to the rest of the members. Tamam Ghoul, director of the coordination office to the negotiations with the WTO told the Jordan Times Friday.

Ms. Ghoul added that the conference also focused on some members' failure to implement WTO agreements.

Jordan, which acted as an

observer at the Geneva meeting, concluded its first formal round of negotiations with the WTO last July following an inaugural round in October 1996 when the Kingdom submitted a detailed memorandum to the organisation's members describing the country's economic situation with special emphasis on trade issues.

The next round of negotiations between Jordan and the WTO will take place in Geneva during the last week of July.

Dr. Mulki told reporters that he will soon meet his Egyptian and Tunisian counterparts in Jordan to discuss relations with the international economic blocs such as Europe and Southeast Asia.

World bank ready to broaden lending to Russia—report

MOSCOW (AFP) — The visiting president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, expressed confidence in Russia and indicated that the bank was ready to extend new loans, the Inter-Tass news agency reported Thursday.

Mr. Wolfensohn, speaking after a meeting with members of the Russian parliament, said that the World Bank, as a long-term partner of Russia, was ready to extend loans to the extent needed by Russia, the agency reported.

Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko had said earlier in the day that he intended to request an extra loan to support the mining industry.

Miners have been on strike for a week to press for pay-

ment of several months of back wages.

Mr. Wolfensohn repeated that he had "confidence and faith" in Russia and stressed that a country in transition had to pay particular attention to social matters.

But the Russian government had also to solve its budget deficit which was increasing dangerously and might "sink the country," the report quoted him as saying.

Mr. Wolfensohn arrived here late Tuesday for a two-day visit and was to meet President Boris Yeltsin and Kiriyenko Thursday.

Since 1992 Russia has received \$10 billion in loans from the World Bank and of which \$6 billion has already been spent.

Standard and Poor's downgrades Romanian debt

BUCHAREST (AFP) — The U.S. credit-rating agency Standard and Poor's (SP), downgraded the rating for Romania's long-term foreign-currency debt on Friday from BB minus to B plus.

Long-term debt in national currency was downgraded from BBB minus to BB and the rating for short-term debt in national currency was reduced from A3 to B.

But the agency held the rating for short-term foreign debt at B.

The agency said that it had downgraded the ratings in view of the last five months of performance by the economy which had been marked by economic imbalances, government instability and fragility in the banking sector.

Romanian privatisation Minister Sorin Dimitriu expressed "surprise" at the decision.

"I am sure that the agency did not have the right information when it made this judgement," he said.

Asian currencies fall, Indonesian rupiah shunned

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Asian currencies fell against the U.S. dollar Friday and investors kept their distance from the embattled Indonesian rupiah as Jakarta announced a fresh cabinet to ring in much-needed reforms.

Dealers said that banking problems in Jakarta hindering the smooth settlement of rupiah trades were uppermost in the minds of investors.

The banking problems overshadowed the announcement of the so-called "reform" cabinet line-up by new Indonesian President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, who replaced the long-reigning Suharto Thursday.

"No one wants to trade the rupiah because of the prevailing uncertainty, everyone is assessing the impacts on the banking sector because Indonesia today is vastly different from Indonesia two or three weeks ago," said Sani Hamid, analyst with U.S. research house Standard and Poor's MMS.

Mr. Hamid said fears also gripped the market about a reassessment of Indonesia's credit risk, already at a low ebb.

Offshore funds did not want to trade with onshore players because a week after bloody riots that left more than 500 dead, most banks in Jakarta have still not fully opened their doors and this has led to a backlog of settlements in rupiah trades.

The Indonesian rupiah ended Asian trading on Friday flat at around 10,900 to 11,000 to the greenback, little changed from the closing rates on Wednesday and Thursday as the market took the new cabinet line-up in its stride.

"If the people had regarded it as a major cabinet reshuffle or expected many new names, they had read too much into it," said Andrew Fung, treasury economist with Standard Chartered bank here.

"Going by the new line-up, the cabinet can address only the economic reforms."

The political reforms have to be addressed largely outside the cabinet," Mr. Fung said.

He stressed that while President Habibie's cabinet wanted to move swiftly to put the shattered economy in order, it also had to toe a very thin line because the ground rules would be largely set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"They will not want to reignite social pressures," he said.

Mr. Habibie excluded former President Suharto's golfing buddy Mohammad "Bob" Hasan, the former trade minister, and his eldest daughter Siti "Tutur" Hardiyanti Rukmana who held the social affairs portfolio.

Their appointments in March to the previous cabinet, as the country's economic crisis spiralled out of control, were widely condemned as examples of nepotism and cronyism.

He named Ginjar Kartasasmita as coordinating minister for economy, industry and finance. He is known to have good relations with the IMF.

Mr. Hamid of MMS said some market players felt that Habibie had inducted many of his friends from the Muslim Intellectuals Society of Indonesia or ICMI into the cabinet to reward them for "indirectly" helping him become president.

"Some are claiming that 20 per cent of the cabinet comprises ICMI members," he said.

Dealers said the other Asian currencies mostly held their own against the greenback but shed early gains to end Friday in negative territory.

The Singapore dollar fell to 1.6380 against the U.S. dollar from Thursday's close of 1.6375. The Taiwan dollar to 33.610 from 33.553, the Malaysian ringgit to 3.7900 from 3.7650 and the Thai baht at 39.34 from 39.07.

The Philippine peso rose to 38.72 from 38.83 and the South Korean won to 1,384 from 1,388.

Belgium minister says euro could be model for crisis-hit Asia

BANGKOK (AFP) — Belgium's Foreign Affairs Minister Erik Derycke Friday praised the European single currency, saying it could be a good model for crisis-hit Asia.

"In view of the monetary instability in Asia, it may be useful for the European Union to share its experience of monetary cooperation with our Asian partners. I think this would be a meaningful contribution to the EU-ASEAN dialogue," he told the Thai-Belgium Chamber of Commerce here.

"... Perhaps this form of structured monetary cooperation, which led to an environment of monetary stability, could be envisaged among ASEAN-countries in the future," he said.

Derycke also defended Europe's involvement in helping crisis-stricken Asian economies and dismissed claims it had been absent in material terms.

"In material terms, European interests in Asia and its contribution to the rescue packages put forward were larger than those of the U.S."

At the recent ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) summit in London, he said, Europe "made it amply clear that we are not fair weather friends and will not turn our backs on partners in need."

The Belgium minister assured Thai officials, notably Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, that he had confidence in Thailand's ability to overcome its current difficulties.

Thailand has been struggling with its worst economic crisis in recent history for nearly a year.

Mr. Derycke, accompanied by a business delegation, has been in Bangkok since Thursday. The trip is aimed mainly at boosting commercial ties, with bilateral trade between the two nations now standing at \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Derycke leaves Thailand for Brussels on Saturday evening.

HOROSCOPES

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, MAY 23, 1998
By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You find yourself slowing down. This is good, because it gives you a while to get used to your new skills before you use them very much. Do a few test drives around the neighbourhood before you take this new buggy — you — out onto the superhighways of life.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're going to have a rather uncharacteristic fit of self-indulgence tonight or tomorrow. Why not go ahead and plan this out? Decide ahead of time what you're going to buy, where you're going to go out to dinner, all that stuff. This could turn out to be fun after all.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) It's time to complete something with a friend. You also promised you'd do lunch. Well, why don't you start with that? It's time you had a good talk with this person. You'll both feel better once this is cleared up. Go to a nice place.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) The Taurus moon lends you strength and stability. A gathering of friends will be productive, due to your creativity. If you're involved in a worthy cause, you'll be amazed at what you get done. If you're not, you should be. Call a person who is and talk it over.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Someone in authority would like to tell you what to do. This person has figured out how your life would be so much better if you'd just go along with the agenda. Listen to what the agenda is before you reject it. This other person might just be on to something.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) This is a good weekend for visiting a dear loved one. This person likes to tell you what to do. Being such a sweetheart, you listen politely. That makes him or her feel marvellous. You don't have to really do what this person says, just listen. That's enough.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Wouldn't you know it? Here's the weekend, and all you can think of is what you can and can't afford. You don't want to shop. You want to travel. You want to go places and see things. Well, get a friend to share carfare and go together. Forget the other stuff.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You get to rest a bit, and that will be welcome after the activity of the last few days. Don't plan to go anywhere this weekend. Do what works best for you and the people you love best. And let it go at that. You can overexert yourself some other time.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You get to work over the weekend. It looks like someone is ordering you around. That could be your sweetheart, with a honey-do list. Give it your best shot. You will be repaid, although it may not be in money, and it may not be right away. It'll be worth the effort, and the wait.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You feel like time is running out and you need to finish things now. That's good. It's inspirational and motivational to have those feelings, even if it's also irritating. Once you and a loved one have ironed out your differences, it could even be fun.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) It's a good weekend to stay home. Invite friends to your house instead of going to theirs. Don't keep them there all night talking, either. Save some special time for that one particular person. You should know who that is by the time the evening's through.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're stirring things up at home. Somebody else might be, too. You're following through on plans you made previously, and that's good. The objective is to have things turn out better than they were instead of worse. You've got a couple days to do it, so get busy.

Birthstone of May: Emerald — Citrine

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

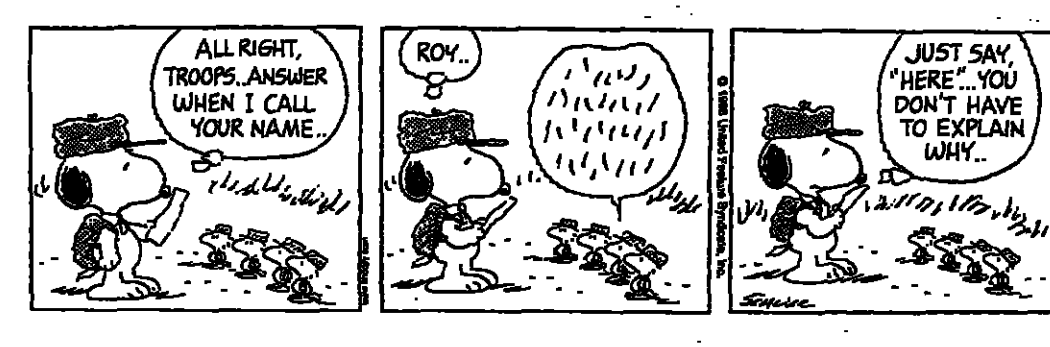
ACROSS

- 1 Son of Jacob
- 6 Memorable times
- 10 Performing couples
- 14 Genetic duplicata
- 15 Roman robe
- 16 Norway capital
- 17 Attractive U?
- 20 You betchel!
- 21 Tragic fate
- 22 Obstacles
- 23 Eastern potatoes
- 25 Jose's home
- 27 Do 360s
- 28 Celestial angels
- 33 Beige shades
- 34 Wendell, the actor
- 35 Washington bill
- 36 & others
- 37 "In Toyland"
- 38 "Animal House" setting: abbr.
- 39 Govt. agent
- 40 Caesar's dog
- 41 Extra-strong cotton thread
- 42 British money
- 44 Edible mushrooms
- 45 Uncious
- 46 Highway accommodation
- 47 Tidy up
- 50 Take spoils
- 51 Take steps
- 54 Orion's dust cloud
- 58 Give off
- 59 Beastly character
- 60 Clemens or Mans
- 61 Service charges
- 62 Hockey score
- 63 Loudmouth lummax

DOWN

- 1 Suffering dull pains
- 2 Blackthorn
- 3 Hard bargain
- 4 Type widths
- 5 Makes more revisions
- 6 Attitudes of a people
- 7 Capacity
- 8 Long, long time
- 9 America's uncle
- 10 Stetl a pooch
- 11 Annapolis sch.
- 12 Designer Cassini
- 13 Boozers
- 18 Tender
- 19 Ore analysis
- 24 Heavy hammer
- 25 Daugther of Ops
- 26 God of war
- 27 Coral colonies
- 28 Group of eight
- 29 Wyman movie
- 30 Stable joke response?
- 31 Dries (out)
- 34 Shrewd
- 37 Bondeman's outlay
- 38 Give the ax
- 40 Singer Patsy
- 41 State gambling
- 43 Cooks with dry heat
- 44 Natural satellite
- 46 Sample house
- 47 Child's profession
- 48 Toots's capital
- 49 New York canal
- 50 "Doctor Zhivago" girl
- 52 "Carry on"
- 53 Poi base
- 55 Table tyrant
- 56 Self image
- 57 Tightening snake

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"I opened the freezer and oven at the same time and now we've got thunderstorms in the kitchen!"

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

INNOO

MOROG

WEVILS

IMLYRG

Answer: A

Yesterday's Jumble: GRIPE KNOWN BUREAU JUNGLE
Answer: Why he avoided the tunnel crew — THEY WERE BORING

Consultants advise m

By Hasher Majoka

AMMAN — Ministers of Industry and Trade, Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and Labour have been advised by a group of international consultants to improve the country's economic performance.

The consultants, who are part of a team led by the World Bank, have been working on a project to improve the country's economic performance. They have been advising the government on various issues, including the need to improve the country's infrastructure, to improve the country's legal system, and to improve the country's financial system.

The consultants have also been advising the government on the need to improve the country's human resources. They have been advising the government on the need to improve the country's education system, to improve the country's health system, and to improve the country's social services.

The consultants have also been advising the government on the need to improve the country's environment. They have been advising the government on the need to improve the country's water supply, to improve the country's waste management, and to improve the country's air quality.

Pollution costs Leb

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon's government is considering a new law to regulate the use of cars in the capital, Beirut, to reduce air pollution.

The law would require all cars to be inspected regularly and to meet certain standards for emissions. It would also require all cars to be painted in a certain color, and to have a certain type of license plate.

The law is being considered because of the increasing amount of air pollution in Beirut. The pollution is caused by the large number of cars in the city, and by the lack of adequate public transportation.

REUTERS The Business

Major Currencies & Commodities			
Currency	USD	GBP	JPY
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7000	110.00
DE Mark	0.6567	1.0000	163.64
GB Sterling	1.6314	1.0000	163.64
CH Franc	0.6833	1.1877	163.64
JP Yen	0.0074	1.2948	163.64
CA Dollar	0.6889	1.2948	163.64
IT Lira	0.0006	1.2948	163.64
NL Guilder	0.0045	1.2948	163.64
FR Franc	0.1855	1.2948	163.64

Energy			
Currency	USD	GBP	JPY
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7000	110.00
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	0.7000	110.00
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1838	110.00
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8807	110.00
Qatar Dinar	0.2748	0.1948	110.00
Kuwait Dinar	3.2706	2.3189	110.00
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	110.00
Lebanese 1000	0.86	0.6086	110.00
Egyptian	0.2928	0.2076	110.00

Metal Prices			
Metal	Bid	Offer	
Gold (oz's)	300	300.5	
Silver (oz's)	5.28	5.32	
Platinum (oz's)	375	381	
AL (3 Months)	1411	1412	
CU (3 Months)	1703	1708	
Zinc (3 Months)	1080	1085	
Lead (3 Months)	676	680	
Ni (3 Months)	4920	4980	

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Maldini waits on Del Piero, recalls Baggio to squad

ROME (AFP) — Italy coach Cesare Maldini ended months of speculation by naming Roberto Baggio in his World Cup squad on Thursday, but then dropped a bombshell by saying that Alessandro Del Piero could be out.

Maldini revealed that Del Piero picked up an injury in Wednesday night's Champions League final defeat to Real Madrid, and said that the man he has groomed to lead Italy at France '98 may not even make the trip.

Del Piero, who has scored 31 goals between the Serie A and the Champions League this season, pulled the upper thigh (adductor) muscles in his left leg in the closing minutes of the final in Amsterdam.

A medical report was sent from Juventus to doctors at the national team on Thursday, but was not made public under Italy's recent laws on privacy.

The Juventus ace will be examined by Maldini's medical staff on Friday, although FIFA regulations mean that the Italian coach has until midnight of June 2 to announce his definitive list of 22.

Should Del Piero pull out, Maldini's other options are Chelsea star Gianfranco Zola, Parma's Enrico Chiesa and Pierluigi Casiraghi of Lazio.

Baggio's return, along with the surprise inclusion of 34-year-old Inter Milan captain Giuseppe Bergomi, who won the World Cup in 1982, will be a

major boost for the team with the Italian public.

Still the country's best loved and best known footballer, Baggio has silenced his critics by scoring a personal record 22 goals with Bologna this season.

His selection, helped by intense lobbying by the Italian press, comes more than a year since he last played for Italy. Baggio ended a near two-year exile by scoring a superb solo goal against Poland in a 3-0 qualifying win in April, 1997 at Naples.

Before then, his international career had been pretty much cut short by then national coach Arrigo Sacchi, who seemed unable to forgive the striker for missing a penalty in their shoot-out with Brazil in the USA '94 final.

More recently, the 31-year-old has been considering his various options at club level. His agent Vittorio Petrone said: "There have been no shortage of offers, but the one he's been after most has come from the national team."

"Roberto has proved this year that he is capable of playing a first-class championship."

Now very much in demand, Baggio could even end up alongside Ronaldo at Inter Milan.

The other forwards are Filippo Inzaghi, Del Piero's partner in Juventus, where they have scored nearly 60 goals this season, Atletico Madrid's Christian Vieri and

Olympique Marseille's Fabrizio Ravanelli.

All of those chosen are either current or former Juventus strikers.

"It's a truly great feeling," said Ravanelli. "I hope I can be useful to the squad. I think I'm in good shape, and I've worked at being fit, even now that the French championship has finished."

There were no surprises in midfield, and only one at the back, where Bergomi makes an emotional return.

Bergomi, affectionately nicknamed "the uncle" in Italy, was an 18-year-old stripling when he won the World Cup in Spain — where Maldini was deputy coach to Enzo Bearzot.

He last played for his country in June 1991, and has been recalled after Ciro Ferrara broke a leg, leaving first-choice AC Milan's Alessandro Costacurta as the team's only experienced libero.

Bergomi said: "I've suffered for not being in the squad, my soul was never at peace. Now I'm as excited as I was the first time, perhaps more, even though I know what my position will be — the subs' bench."

Italy face Chile, Cameroon and Austria in Group B when France '98 gets underway. They will play their last friendly in Sweden on June 2 and fly to Paris three days later. They start against Chile on June 11.

Typhoon hopes to take France by storm

PARIS (AFP) — Cameroon striker Patrick Mboma may be known as the Typhoon, but he hardly stirred up a storm at the African Nations Cup this year.

A nagging injury restricted the tall, French reared and Japanese based star to brief appearances and the Indomitable Lions attack lost much of its venom.

Mboma, whose two goals in Zimbabwe last August sealed a third consecutive World Cup appearance for Cameroon, arrived in Paris this week for further treatment to his troublesome thigh.

He has much to prove in the land where he struggled to establish himself as a professional footballer during two spells with Paris Saint Germain and one at Metz.

"I was not able to display my true ability because I did not have the trust of my managers," says the striker who lived in the shadows of stars like George Weah. David Ginola and Patrick Loko.

His move to J-League club Gamba Osaka last year proved a masterstroke as he finished the Japanese season with 27 goals and first place in the scorers' standings.

"I have been scoring so many spectacular goals that I have even surprised myself. I'm so confident and desperate to put the disappointment of the Nations Cup behind me," Mboma says.

Cameroon will look to him and German-based Alphonse Tchami to carry on where hip-wriggling Roger Milla and Francois Omam-Biyik left off in Italy eight years ago.

Santrac leads new Yugoslavian team

PARIS (AFP) — Slobodan Santrac is set to lead a tougher, more resilient, Yugoslavian squad in France this summer to add to the riches of raw talent the country continually produces.

Yugoslavia's last appearance in a major finals was in 1990 when they fell to Argentina in the quarter-finals before civil war in the Balkans prevented them competing on the international stage.

Since the redrawing of the map in Europe, Yugoslavia comprises only the combined republics of Serbia and Montenegro. But on the positive side, Santrac now heads a squad hardened by the rigours of war to add to its usual natural talent.

Santrac himself was four-times top scorer in the Yugoslavian league with OFK Belgrade and has 236 domestic goals to his record, making him his country's all-time top marksman.

So it is no wonder he had a great deal of influence in the team scoring 29 times in their 10 World Cup qualifiers.

He also earned eight international caps and scored on his debut against Bulgaria in June 1966. He did not, however, come to the international coach's job till October 1992 when Yugoslavia were already in the international wilderness.

World Cup countdown with Franz Beckenbauer

Are you a World Cup expert? Then let me challenge you

What's wrong here?



A scene from the match Italy vs Germany (0-0) in the Euro 96 competition which took place in England. Fighting for the ball are Fredi Bobic and Paolo Maldini, nephew of the current trainer of the Italian national team, Cesare Maldini, who has the difficult task of filling the shoes of one of Italy's historic technical directors, Fabio Capelli. Italy just managed to qualify for the World Cup in France but only after great pains in a play-off against Russia, who fell by the wayside.

7) The World Cup final in the

United States was something special. For the first time in World Cup history the champion was determined on the result of penalties. Brazil made off with the title because their players had nerves of steel.

In comparison, Italy's players' knees were knocking. Roberto Baggio and Franco Baresi, two of the best players in the "squadra azzurra", both missed their penalties after regular time had finished in a scoreless draw.

Up to then this unheard of.

In the past all teams contesting a World Cup final have scored at least one goal — with one exception. Which team was this?

Solve the geography question daily to find the phrase at the end of Beckenbauer's World Cup countdown

7) Among the many natural resources of this country is an abundance of trees. But the rainforest is in danger and a subject for concern for environmentalists the world over. The inhabitants themselves are no less concerned because, although the country has become something of an economic superpower, the majority of its population remains poor and many children sleep on the streets. However, rich and poor, each in their own way, simultaneously celebrate extravagant open-air festivals which feature music, dance and a distinct lack of clothing. Because of their erotic nature, these festivals are the envy of countries all over the world. The capital is only 38 years old. The country's most famous athlete is only 19.5 years old and in the meantime has become a government minister.

The name of one of the country's most important export goods is often used to describe the colour of this sportsman-cum-minister. The land is intersected by the world's second largest and most voluminous river. The rainforest areas along its banks are gradually being eroded for cultivation and this is regarded as one of the factors responsible for the present

SOLUTION TO THE WORLD CUP COUNTRY CONTEST
The phrase we are looking for offers a rather precise, though harsh definition of an ability considered indispensable in the world of diplomats.

Please fill in the respective letters in the corresponding positions:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26
27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39
40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65
66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74

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Facts and figures about the participating countries

CHILE

756,626 sq km Capital: Santiago de Chile
Population: 14,210,429 — 18.8 per sq km
Principal language: Spanish
Annual GNP per capita: US\$ 3,560. — (1994)

Participation in World Cup championships: 1962

Here are the solutions for the first six challenge quizzes. The geography question solutions will be run at the end of the countdown, while the photo questions will be answered daily.

- 1) Gianni Rivera
- 2) In the fifth World Cup in Switzerland 1954. It was the inaugural match, which took place between France and Yugoslavia.
- 3) It was the left.
- 4) In Mexico 1970.
- 5) Egypt, in Italy 1934. They qualified

after defeating Palestine 7-1 away in the preliminary round and 4-1 at home. They subsequently passed through to the final rounds after their second qualifying round opponents, Turkey, failed to make an appearance.

6) In one world championship only, in Uruguay 1930, when the United States and Yugoslavia both were beaten in their respective semifinal matches and, despite not having played, were both awarded third place.

Keller makes 3rd World Cup trip

PARIS (AFP) — It is a long way from Lacey, Washington, to the World Cup finals, but it is a trip United States goalkeeper Kasey Keller will be making for the third time this summer.

The former University of Portland goalkeeper, now an established English Premiership star with Leicester City, was a squad member at the 1990 World Cup in Italy and then played when his country hosted the event in 1994.

Keller and Liverpool keeper Brad Friedel will be duelling for a starting role at France '98.

While there is considerable optimism in the American camp, Keller warns that building a team of players based in different countries and with different attitudes is a difficult assignment.

"The U.S. squad is made up of players coming from different backgrounds and it is difficult as we are not playing with each other day in, day out," Keller said.

Keller was completing a degree in sociology when Millwall offered him the chance to play professionally in England.

Keller, not one to be thwarted by a challenge, decided to complete his degree by correspondence and has spent the past few years shuttling between Leicester and his national team commitments.

The tall, imposing goalkeeper was tempted to return home to play in the fledgling Major League Soccer competition when it was launched three seasons ago, but elected instead to stay with Leicester. He has helped the club become a mid-table fixture in the English Premiership.

Keller now sees it future with Leicester, but will eventually return to the States.

"I have a couple more World Cups in me, a few more seasons in Europe and then I think it will be time for me to return home and help out with my experience."



Brazilian striker Ronaldo gives the thumbs up as he arrives at the Chateau de Grande Romaine Hotel in France where the Brazilian team will stay during the 1998 World Cup. Brazil will play against Scotland in the opening match of the World Cup (Reuters photo)

Brazilians arrive in France

PARIS (AFP) — Defending World Cup champions Brazil arrived in France on Friday, almost three weeks ahead of the start of the 1998 tournament.

The Brazilians flew into Charles De Gaulle Airport and then set off for Lezigny, the town in the Seine-et-Marne region where they will be based for the tournament — which runs from May 10 to June 12.

The Brazilians were scheduled to hold a light training session at nearby Ozoir-La-Ferrière during the afternoon.

The defending champions will play their final warm-up match against Spanish club Athletic Bilbao on May 31 and open their defence of the World Cup against Scotland in the Stade de France on June 10.

Bolton set to cash in on Thompson

BOLTON (AFP) — Alan Thompson, the target of several top English Premiership sides, wants to leave relegated Bolton — no club will have to pay £5 million — £8 million to find him. Bolton manager Colin Todd said Friday.

Todd admitted he was assigned to leaving Thompson and revealed that the club had received a bid of around £4.5 million before last season's transfer deadline.

Thompson has been linked with moves to Everton and Newcastle. "There has been a lot of speculation about the player's future and Alan and his agent have now indicated that he wishes to leave the club," said Todd.

He did turn down a Premier League club's bid before deadline day when his wages were in excess of £550,000.

Jan aware that several clubs are reported to be interested but any serious offer would need to start at £5 million.

Peter Phillips

De Bruin faces to save car

BRIN (AFP) — Irish Olympic champion Peter De Bruin faces a two-year career after it was revealed that the potent medalist drove a stolen car in the U.S. sample of a car accident has also been taken from the back-up sample.

De Bruin will now face a disciplinary hearing to be held by FINA, swimming's international governing body.

De Bruin's solicitor, Peter De Bruin, said the analysis of the two samples, along with a biochemist from a hospital in Barcelona, was completed on Thursday.

Time newspaper, London said, "It appears that at this time that our car can only be charged with physical manipulation and the use of any banned substance."

We do not expect to be any change from the adulteration of the A and B samples.

De Bruin said that she was determined to save her career and that she would appeal any charges that may be brought against her.

De Bruin will call upon the Irish Olympic Committee to prove that she was not manipulated.

De Bruin is expected that she will be brought before the doping panel for a hearing in late June. That

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF
A TANNAN WISDOM

TOMMY RAKES IN ANOTHER

North leads
NORTH
AKQJ3
AQ
J8
AQ10973
SOUTH
AK8
AK107632
AK3

WEST
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	Bruce Willis & Richard Gere ... in THE JACKAL Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Jim Carrey ... in LIAR-LIAR Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	The biggest cinema production TITANIC Shows: 12:00, 3:30, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.	CONCORD THE RELIC Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORD ISMAILIA RAYEH GAI-KAMANANA Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN Charlie Sheen ... in SHADOW CONSPIRACY	ABDOUN Denzel Washington & Whitney Houston ... in THE PREACHER'S WIFE & still showing at 8:30 p.m. TITANIC	STARTING APRIL 6TH Don't Laugh Please We're Jordanian Starring Hisham Yanes, Amal Dabbas, Rania Kurdi and the group at 8:30 p.m. For reservations call: 4640155, 4625155

Bolton set to cash in on Thompson

BOLTON (AFP) — Alan Thompson, the target of several top English Premiership sides, wants to leave relegated Bolton — but clubs will have to table £5 million (\$8 million) to land him, Bolton manager Colin Todd said Friday.

Todd admitted he was resigned to losing Thompson and revealed that the club had rejected a bid of around £4.5 million before last season's transfer deadline.

Thompson has been linked with moves to Everton and Newcastle.

"There has been a lot of speculation about the player's future and Alan and his agent have now indicated that he wishes to leave the club," said Todd.

"We did turn down a Premier League club's offer before deadline day which was in excess of £4.5 million."

"I am aware that several clubs are reported to be interested but any serious bidder would need to start at £5 million."



Petr Korda of the Czech Republic celebrates his victory over Australia's Mark Philippoussis on the fifth day of the World Team Cup men's tennis tournament in Dusseldorf May 22. Korda won the match 6-3 3-6 6-2 (Reuters photo)

De Bruin faces fight to save career

DUBLIN (AFP) — Irish triple Olympic champions Michelle de Bruin faces a fight to save her career after it was revealed that the potentially-lethal dose of alcohol found in the A sample of a urine specimen has also been found in the back-up sample.

De Bruin will now face a disciplinary hearing to be conducted by FINA, swimming's international governing body.

De Bruin's solicitor, Peter Lennon, watched the analysis of the twin samples along with a biochemist from a Dublin hospital in Barcelona, Spain, on Thursday.

In a statement to London's The Times newspaper, Lennon said: "It appears clear at this time that our client can only be charged with physical manipulation and not the use of any banned substance... we do not expect there to be any change between the adulterisation results of the A and B sample."

De Bruin said that she was "more determined than ever to fight any charges that may be formally brought against her" and indicated that she and Lennon will call upon FINA to prove that she was the one who manipulated the sample.

It is now expected that De Bruin will be brought before FINA's doping panel for a hearing in late June. That

panel will decide on any penalty.

Manipulation of a sample carries a lifetime ban, although De Bruin could appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland.

De Bruin, winner of three gold medals at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, underwent an out-of-competition test on January 10 at her home in Kilkenny County, Ireland.

The urine specimen was divided into A and B samples and sealed in separate containers.

FINA said De Bruin's A sample, tested earlier at the Barcelona lab, showed "unequivocal signs of adulteration" and "physical manipulation."

De Bruin, 28, has denied tampering with her test and said any manipulation must have taken place after it was out of her sight — and the evidence supplied to FINA by the drug-testers, Al and Kay Guy, after the January test may again be looked at.

Dr Jose Merino, the doctor who represented FINA at the testing of the B sample, said: "I cannot of course say anything about the testing."

"But what you can be assured of is that this laboratory is among the most prestigious of the international Olympic Committee laboratories."

England legend blasts money-mad World Cup stars

LONDON (AFP) — England legend Sir Tom Finney on Friday slammed England players who are currently involved in a cash row with the Football Association (FA).

Squad members are in dispute over the use of the England shirt in personal promotions with the World Cup less than three weeks away.

But Finney, who won 76 England caps in the 1940s and 50s and is widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time, believes the players' financial rewards will be gained from World Cup success.

"I feel they should be concentrating on what is going to happen in the World Cup," said former winger Finney. "The cash will come automatically if they do well in the tournament."

"When we played it was the fact that you were playing for your country and that was sufficient and you never thought about the rest of it."

"I suppose today it has all changed completely — it seems to be about money first and foremost."

"I think you've got to produce the goods first before you start talking about what you're going to get out of it."

Finney, who once famously rejected Italian club Palermo's offer of £10,130 (\$17,000) per month despite being on just £14 per week at Preston, refused to blame the players for trying to increase their financial security.

And he added if big businesses wanted to use England stars for advertising purposes, the players must jump at the opportunity.

"It does seem a shame but having said that, you can't blame the players if somebody comes along," added Finney.

"I've got no problems about that whatsoever because they're cashing in on it as well as the players."

"If you've got a player like Alan Shearer, you can't blame him because if McDonalds come along and say they want him to do this, that and the other, he is entitled to negotiate whatever he can get for it."

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Bird's Pacers look to be aggressive

INDIANAPOLIS (AFP) — Unable to stop Michael Jordan in Chicago, Indiana coach Larry Bird has put his noisy supporters on notice that their help will be needed to conquer the Chicago Bulls.

"We have a chance to win this game if we get after them," Bird said here Thursday. "The fans better be ready to come here and get behind us or this season is over."

The Bulls own a 2-0 lead over Indiana in their best-of-seven National Basketball Association semi-final, which continues here Saturday and Monday.

"We're hoping being at home will help, playing in front of the home crowd," Indiana guard Jalen Rose said. "Hopefully it'll energize us. Being down 0-2 this is the game of our season."

The Pacers won 32 of 41 home games this season and are 5-0 here in the playoffs. But the Bulls are 3-0 on the road in the playoffs and have won 30 of 43 road games in five prior title runs over the past seven years.

Jordan has averaged 36 points a game in his first playoff series with Indiana, scoring more than Indiana's top two scorers in both outings. Stopping him is the key.

"That's pretty much what it comes down to," Indiana's Dutch centre Rik Smits said. "He comes up with one big

shot after another."

"A lot of people have tried. The kid has five championship rings," Indiana's Derrick McKey said.

The Bulls have already suffered one loss here. Coach Phil Jackson has denied the club a trip to Sunday's Indianapolis 500. A practice has been scheduled instead.

Jordan and Scottie Pippen have sparked third-quarter surges that have enabled the Bulls to overcome half-time deficits in both games.

"They've just come out and dominated us in the third quarter," Rose said. "I mean, we were winning both games at halftime and they're just finding ways to jump on us the third quarter."

Indiana scoring leader Reggie Miller agreed, saying, "We have to somehow come up with a better game plan to offset what they do to us to start the second half."

Bird is more concerned about getting the Pacers back to their peak when the second half begins.

"The third quarter has absolutely killed us in this series," Bird said. "Usually we are a great third quarter team. For some reason we come out of the locker room without the intensity level that we should be at."

French Open preview

Agassi could take early Kuerten call

PARIS (AFP) — Gustavo Kuerten's defence of his French Open title suffered a setback before he hits a ball in anger Friday when he found himself drawn for a potentially explosive second-round showdown with two-time finalist Andre Agassi.

Former French player Guy Forget, who officiated at the draw for the clay-court event inside the Roland Garros Stadium, drew the eighth-seeded Brazilian out of the hat for a first-round clash against French wildcard entry Charles Auzan.

And then he immediately produced Agassi as the defending champion's potential second-round opponent.

The flamboyant 28-year-old Agassi, who was beaten in the 1990 and 1991 finals, is being tipped by many to go one step further this year after staging a remarkable comeback this season by climbing back to 20th in the rankings.

At the end of 1997 he had

dropped out of the top-100 for

the first time since turning professional in 1986.

But if Kuerten has early

headaches in his attempt to

reach an allocated quarter-final

berth against Czech veteran

Petr Korda, things don't look

too bad for World No. 2 Pete

Sampras.

Sampras, who will be launching

his ninth campaign to win the

only major title missing from

his collection, has an awkward

first-round showdown with

fellow American Todd

Martin. But he should then find

progress relatively easy with

only Ukraine's Andrei

Medvedev looking to be a danger

in his portion of the draw —

at least until the fourth-round

where he would face a fourth-

round clash against Spain's

15th-seeded slow court specialist

Felix Mantilla.

Sweden's seventh-seed Jonas

Bjorkman was handed one of

the toughest first-round ties. He

will play Austria's 1995 champion

and former World No. 1

Thomas Muster, still considered

a major force on clay although

he has dropped just out of the

world's top 20 after a disappointing

start to the season.

Tournament favourite

Marcelo Rios of Chile will



Andre Agassi

open against Brett Steven of New Zealand and he can then expect to complete unfinished business in the fourth-round, where he is drawn to face 13th-seeded Spaniard Albert Costa.

Costa, whose first-round opponent will be Kenneth Carlsen of Denmark, was due to play Rios in the Italian Open final last weekend but he was

forced to scratch at the 11th hour because of a wrist injury.

Britain's fifth-seed Greg Rusedski, who has only won three matches in three visits to the French capital where the

deadly slow red clay takes the bite out of his big serve and robs his volleys of their usual power, can't complain about his draw.

First he will face Belgian Johan Van Herck in the first round and then a qualifier in the second.

After that things could get more difficult.

Either twice-champion Jim Courier, who is currently 49th in the rankings and who faces Richard Fromberg of Australia in the first-round, or Spain's Carlos Costa, who faces a qual-

ifier, could be Rusedski's third-round opponent.

The 1996 champion and sixth seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia opens against a qualifier but should then face in-form Thomas Enqvist of Sweden.

He could also face unseeded Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia in the third-round.

Ivanisevic, desperately trying to stop his free-fall in the rankings (he is currently 26th) opens against a qualifier and would then play either last year's semi-finalist Filip Dewulf of Belgium or Magnus Larsson of Sweden. The winner would then face Kafelnikov.

Michael Chang, the 1989 winner and the eleventh seed, plays Spaniard Alex Calatrava in what should be a relatively easy first-round clash, but Calatrava's 1th-seeded compatriot Alex Corretja has a tough opening outing against Morocco's Karim Alami.

Australian Patrick Rafter, one of the most popular players with the Roland Garros crowd last year when he charged through to the semi-finals only to be thwarted by Spain's Sergi Bruguera, plays Canadian Sebastian Lareau.

Australian Open champion Korda, who will be bidding for his second consecutive Grand Slam crown, faces a qualifier before taking on either 'bad-boy' American Jeff Tarango or Paul Haarhuis of the Netherlands.

Kenz

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♣ Q 10 9 7 3

WEST
♠ Q 6
♥ 9
♦ Q 10 9 5 4 2
♣ K J 6 4

EAST
♠ J 10 8 2
♥ J 8 4 2
♦ J 8
♣ A 8 5 2

SOUTH
♠ A 9 8
♥ K 10 7 5 3
♦ A K 3
♣ A

The bidding:

NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1♠ Pass 10 Pass
1♠ Pass 30 Pass
1♠ Pass 4NT Pass
50 Pass 60 Pass

Opening lead: Ten of ♠

For Trump Coup Tommy, the season to be jolly was when trumps were stacked against him. That's when our hero became transformed from the club patty to a wizard of the pastboards. After what had been a slow year for Tommy because most hands divided normally, there was a sudden rash of bad distributions, and Tommy was in his element.

The auction proceeded well until North took a preference to three hearts. Then Tommy, who had made a fine bid by jump-shifting in the strong three-card minor to show power, could stand it no longer. To all intents and purposes, South simply took the bull by the horns and bid the small slam in hearts.

West led from the interior diamond sequence, and Tommy won in hand. The ace of clubs was cleared, and Tommy's posture stiffened when, on the lead of a trump to the ace, West produced the nine — it had all the earmarks of a singleton.

Tommy ruffed a club in hand, cashed the remaining high diamond and ruffed a diamond with the table's trump honor as East discarded a club. On a club lead from the board, East discarded a spade as declarer ruffed. Next came the ace and king of spades, reducing East to three trumps and a high spade, while Tommy held three trumps and a losing spade.

When a club was led from dummy, East was a goner. If the defender ruffed, declarer would overruff as cheaply as possible, exit with a spade and score the last two trump tricks when East was forced to return a trump. If East discarded, Tommy would ruff and exit with a spade which East would have to ruff, to produce the same endplay.

The knots united. An information revelation



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Israel says planned peace conference aims to isolate it

'Israel's biggest worry is the fact Washington appears willing to let the initiative go ahead'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel charged Friday that plans by France and Egypt to hold an international conference to save the Middle East peace process were designed to isolate it for the negotiating deadlock.

"This kind of a conference is an attempt to brand us as responsible for the stalemate in the peace process," said Eitan Ben-Tzur, the number two official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Mr. Ben-Tzur denounced in particular the fact that the Franco-Egyptian proposal calls for Israel and the Palestinians to be excluded from the first phase of the conference.

"They didn't even contact us about this," he said in a radio interview.

"This meeting could not help revive direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and so has no reason to be held," he said.

President Jacques Chirac of France and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt issued a joint call following a meeting earlier this week in Paris for a conference of "countries determined to save peace" in the Middle East.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine told an Israeli newspaper Wednesday that it was "impossible" to call such a conference with the participation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who

France and Arab nations hold responsible for the crisis.

Mr. Vedrine said the conference should be in two stages, with Israeli and Palestinian officials taking part only in phase two.

The 22-nation Arab League backed the call, as did the Palestinians, although no date or setting for the conference have been decided.

Israel's Foreign Ministry issued a formal rejection of the proposal late Thursday and Mr. Netanyahu said an international conference would only divert energy from necessary direct negotiations between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states.

"Our neighbours must stop thinking that others will do the work for them," Mr. Netanyahu said.

At the same time, however, the 14-month deadlock in negotiations with the Palestinians has forced Mr. Netanyahu to turn increasingly to the United States as an active mediator in the process.

Washington has been trying for months to promote a package deal to revive Israeli-Palestinian talks, but Mr. Netanyahu has so far rejected the key element of the plan — an Israeli withdrawal from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank.

After another series of meetings last week between Mr. Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary

of State Madeleine Albright failed to break the deadlock, U.S. spokesmen openly warned that Washington was nearing the point where it could openly blame Israel for the crisis.

"If we are unable to close the gaps and get agreement to the American ideas soon, we will have to make that clear, explain the reasons for it," said U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin.

Israeli analysts said Friday that Israel's biggest worry about the Franco-Egyptian conference plan was not the possible outcome of the meeting but the very fact Washington appears willing to let the initiative go ahead at Israel's expense.

"The government is very worried by the American silence," said Akiva Eldor, political analyst for the Haaretz newspaper.

"If Washington announced right away that it was opposed to such a conference, the whole thing would be nipped in the bud," he told AFP.

"The absence of any American reaction sends a clear message to Israel: don't think you can automatically count on our support in the world ring if Benjamin Netanyahu persists in rejecting our proposals for reviving the peace process," he said.



THE FRANCOIS CHALAIS PRIZE GOES TO 'WEST BEIRUT': Kuwaiti journalist Abdul Sattar Naji hands over to Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri the Francois Chalais Prize, named after a prominent French journalist, Friday at the Palais des Festivals, for his film 'West Beirut'. The prize is awarded for the second time to the best debut fiction film addressing world issues (AFP photo)

Military prevents clashes between pro-Habibie activists and students

JAKARTA (AFP) — The army intervened Friday to prevent clashes between supporters of Indonesia's new President Bacharuddin Habibie and thousands of students opposed to his appointment.

The Habibie supporters began flooding into the parliamentary complex in Jakarta, where the students have been held up since Monday, shortly after dawn. They waved green banners and shouted "Long live Habibie."

After shouting matches with the students, interrupted by a break for Muslim Friday prayers, they tried to storm the parliament building and evict some 7,000 anti-Habibie students in the complex.

Yelling "Allah the greatest" and "this is public property, you can't stop us," more than 3,000 Habibie supporters managed to push through the cordons of students, who rushed to lock all the parliament entrances from the inside.

Banners and flags claiming support for the new president, who replaced ousted president Suharto on Thursday, were raised. Several people tore down anti-Habibie banners put up by the students.

The complex echoed with shouts of "Long live Habibie" from one side and "Long live the people" from the other as they wrestled for control of the complex.

Major clashes were prevented when some 100 Jakarta command troops moved quietly into the complex, rifles at the ready, and separated the two scuffling mobs.

The soldiers were yelling "calm down" and "be patient" at the tops of their voices for fear of another outbreak of the violence and riots that left some 500 dead in Jakarta last week and undermined the already shaky Suharto regime.

The tension rose when Habibie supporters stormed into the main stairway to the parliament. One fleeing student shouted "We're Muslims, too."

Then, in the early evening the pro-Habibie crowds — made

up of men and women from all walks of life — suddenly melted away from the parliament grounds. Some stayed scattered on one side of the complex but were outnumbered by the increasing number of students.

Some of the students jeered them, suggesting that they had been "paid only a day rate and not a 24-hour rate" to demonstrate.

"They came from West Java and they are well-financed," said Emmy Hafid, director of the Indonesian Forum for Environment. "Their motive is to keep Habibie as the president."

"It is to impose an agenda that Habibie remains in power and to intimidate. Hopefully the Indonesians will be united not to be intimidated again," she added.

The students began calling for Mr. Habibie's ouster soon after Mr. Suharto, 76, stunned the nation Thursday by stepping down under pressure and naming Mr. Habibie, 61, his protégé and vice-president, to succeed him. They are dissatisfied with the newly formed cabinet and demand new parliamentary elections which would lead to the naming of a new president.

"The new cabinet is not what we need, which is a total reform," said a student from an aviation college. "Things won't improve as long as those under Suharto's regime are still in power."

"We don't blame them (Habibie supporters) for coming — because that's what democracy is all about," he added. "But we were here first and they just barged in, taking down our banners and wanting to control the place."

One banner at the parliament complex Friday read: "Suharto and his cronies: Go to Hell" — an apparent pun on him crowning a crotty as his successor.

ing to regional health officials, who have warned the public of side-effects from Viagra.

"Every day, I get dozens of calls asking for Viagra, women included," a Dubai pharmacist told AFP.

A man in his 70s is reported to have offered a local pharmacist \$150 just for two of the pills, compared to the official price of \$10 each on prescription in the United States.

Some pharmacies in Saudi Arabia are selling the pills under the counter, for between \$50 and \$80 a shot, according to newspapers in Riyadh, where authorities have instructed scientists to draw up a report on the drug.

The Kuwaiti health ministry has warned of all kinds of side-effects: on the heart, blood circulation, digestive system, breathing, genitals, nervous system and vision.

But any warnings are being brushed aside in a region where sexual impotence for men has traditionally been treated by herbal concoctions, and of course with the utmost discretion.

Powerful military chief keeps central role in post-Suharto cabinet

JAKARTA (AFP) — New Indonesian President Bacharuddin Habibie on Friday kept military chief General Wiranto in the cabinet, ensuring a central role for the officer credited with hastening the fall of veteran ruler Suharto.

Former Indonesian Vice-President Habibie retained Gen. Wiranto as defence minister one day after taking over from Mr. Suharto, whose 32-year regime ended when mounting popular protests split the ruling clique which includes the armed forces.

Gen. Wiranto immediately put his stamp on the new administration by dismissing calls for ex-President Suharto and his family to be put on trial for allegedly amassing a fortune estimated at tens of billions of dollars.

"These various efforts, which only waste energy, should end," he told journalists, urging Indonesians to give the new government a chance.

"We have already experienced several setbacks, why don't we think forward?" Gen. Wiranto said. "If we are all emotional and only want to listen to our own wishes, it will not help settle the problems."

A high-ranking foreign diplomat said the military now holds "ultimate power" during the uneasy post-Suharto situation in Indonesia.

Mr. Habibie, 61, an aeronautical engineer who owed his rise to power to Mr. Suharto's patronage, is believed to have mixed support in the armed forces, having no military background, and is widely seen as a transitional leader.

The Jakarta Post reported Friday that Gen. Wiranto, a respected professional soldier, played a crucial role in the rapid developments which finally pried loose the 76-year-old Suharto's iron grip on power.

Gen. Wiranto earlier refused to back a parliamentary call for the old man to resign. But after meeting other military leaders, he reportedly urged Mr. Suharto on Wednesday night to resign rather than face impeachment.

The next morning, Mr. Suharto, who holds the rare honorary rank of five-star general, quit in favour of Mr. Habibie in a hastily arranged televised ceremony at the Merdeka state palace.

"The military is not prepared to give up its dual function," said the diplomat, referring to the socio-political and security roles of the just-under 500,000-strong armed forces, known as ABRI.

In the new cabinet unveiled Friday, the military got six out of 36 posts.

The most notable exclusions from the old cabinet were Mr. Suharto's daughter Tuti, who was social affairs minister, and his golfing buddy Mohammad "Bob" Hassan, who was trade and industry minister. They were the most controversial figures in Mr. Suharto's cabinet, which was formed only last March.

During Thursday's handover from Mr. Suharto to Mr. Habibie, Gen. Wiranto delivered a speech vowing to protect the "safety and honour" of Mr. Suharto and his family and warning against new unrest after last week's riots which left 500 dead in Jakarta.

But students who led the anti-Suharto struggle and a top Muslim leader, Amien Rais, have demanded a trial for the former president and his family.

Mr. Habibie, meanwhile, came under pressure Friday to free political prisoners jailed by security forces under Mr. Suharto.

"Our sea fruits hold the key to eternal youth," insisted Abdullah Said, an Omani fighting the tide who cannot understand what all the fuss is about.

Yemeni men, as well as women, are pinning hopes on Viagra to compensate for the lethargic effects of qat, a narcotic plant which is chewed as part of everyday life.

"After chewing qat, I find it difficult to perform at the crucial moment," confessed Nidal, an impatient customer for Viagra who preferred not to be fully identified.

Gulf Today newspaper has warned of "Viagra Blues" and that the drug could still turn into an anti-climax, after all the build-up.

Leonardo Di Caprio still has to prove himself, says Tussauds

LONDON (AFP) — Actor Leonardo Di Caprio may have won the hearts of millions of adolescents in the epic movie Titanic but he has yet to convince Britain's wax museum Madame Tussauds that he is here to stay. The Titanic star is only on a "maybe" list of new commissions because they cannot be sure it will be worth the time and outlay to "cast" him. "We make about 10 new figures each a year so it's very important that we choose people who we think are going to last for a while," said a museum spokesman. It costs about \$40,000 to make a wax image.

Linda McCartney to be honoured in memorial service

LONDON (AP) — Linda McCartney, who died of cancer last month at 56, will be honoured in a June 8 memorial service in central London. Sir Paul McCartney's office said Thursday the service for his wife will be held at 8:30 p.m. in St. Martin in the Fields church on Trafalgar Square. The service is for close friends and family, but animal welfare groups and other people who wish to honour Linda McCartney plan to gather in the square for an informal candlelight tribute at the same time, the office said.

Problems with royal family due to strong woman's opinions — Fergie

SANTIAGO (AP) — Sarah Ferguson, former wife of Prince Andrew of England, says her problems with the royal family have a lot to do with her strong opinions — as a woman. During an appearance Thursday night on a Chilean talk show, she discussed one reason for her difficult relations with the royal family. "I really feel that women have freedom of speech and of opinion," she said on the show "De pe a pa." She also said the late Princess Diana, whose relations with the royal family were also strained, was "like a sister to me."

Huston to self-direct in new film

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Anjelica Huston, the director, didn't have to look far to find a star for her second film. Huston also will play the lead in "The Marquise," an Irish comedy-drama about a feisty young woman left with several children to care for after her husband dies. "I am interested only in directing a project to which I have a very strong connection, [and] this script touched me in a very powerful way," Huston said. Jim Sheridan, who directed "My Left Foot," will co-produce the film. The Academy Award-winning actress won acclaim for the first film "Bastard Out of Carolina."

Border collie as best man

LONDON (AFP) — The groom was there, the priest said his piece and the bride replied "I do." Then the hairy best man lent a helping paw. When Simon Rickman wed his sweetheart Deborah, the best man was not a man, or even a woman. It was Mutley his border collie. The graphic designer from Richmond, southern England, chose Mutley as his best man because he didn't want to upset his brother or best friend, who were the human alternatives. Mutley was kited out with a matching bow tie and cuffs for the occasion and held the rings in his collar. The minister who carried out the service, Julian Reindorp, said the dog even signed the witness book with a paw print.

Group finds no sign of persecution of Christians under PNA rule

TEL AVIV (AP) — Christians living under Palestinian National Authority (PNA) rule are not being persecuted, as Israel claims, Christian scholars and journalists from the United States concluded Friday after a two-week tour of the Holy Land.

The 14-member group, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, checked allegations by the International Christian Embassy, a staunchly pro-Israeli group based in Jerusalem, and by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's senior aide, David Bar-Illan.

The group said it encountered "a handful of very isolated, personal incidents, but no indication of an anti-Christian tide rising."

It said Palestinian Christians, who make up about five per cent of total population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, enjoy more freedom than their brethren in most other areas of

the Mideast.

The U.S. group said it found "disturbing evidence of political motivations" behind the allegations of persecution.

It suggested that the allegations may have been made to turn international public opinion against the PNA and to sway U.S. lawmakers considering a bill that would impose sanctions on countries engaged in religious persecution.

The U.S. group checked several cases involving Christian converts from Islam that had frequently been cited by the International Christian Embassy.

It found that one of the five had been mistreated by local police, possibly because of his conversion, but that there were no signs of an overt campaign to abuse Christians.

Earlier this year, the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, known for its independent views, released similar findings.

Leaders of the International Christian Embassy could not be reached for comment Friday.

Mr. Bar-Illan, stood by his claims, saying they were based upon various personal stories. "There is persecution and discrimination against Christians with the sanction of the Palestinian Authority," he said.

However, others argue that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has gone out of his way to assure that Christians are fairly represented in positions of power. In the 1996 elections to the Palestinian legislature, six of 88 seats were reserved for Christians. When the long-time Christian mayor of the biblical West Bank town of Bethlehem, Elias Freij, died earlier this year, Mr. Arafat named another Christian, Hanna Nasser, as successor even though the town has a Muslim majority.

EU pledges efforts to restore Turkey ties

ANKARA (AFP) — The European Union (EU) is committed to the deepening of ties with Turkey despite Ankara's decision not to attend a key Association Council meeting with the EU next week, a senior European Parliament official said Friday.

Turkey, whose ties with the EU are badly strained, announced Thursday it would not send its foreign minister to the Association Council meeting in Brussels on Monday because of a political dispute.

"The European Commission's strategy document is a good basis for bringing Turkey closer to Europe," Hanne Swoboda, the European Parliament's visiting rapporteur on Turkey-EU relations, said in a press statement here.

"Alongside this commitment to deepening of the [Turkish-EU] customs union with a view to accession, we

will maintain our commitment to human rights and democratic reform," said Mr. Swoboda, an Austrian MP and vice-president of the Socialist group in parliament.

"We regret that the Association Council has been postponed, but we hope that at [the EU summit in June at] Cardiff clarification can be brought about," he said.

Explaining why Turkey boycotted the meeting, a government official said Thursday: "The conditions made for the application of the text [on the European strategy for Turkey] are the same as those posed to us by the union in late April."

He was referring to a memorandum calling on Turkey to resolve problems in its relations with Greece, the question of the divided island of Cyprus and Turkey's human rights situation.

"We cannot accept these [conditions]," the source said. "We cannot bargain over the vital questions of Cyprus and the Aegean in return for some money."

The European strategy aims to expand the existing customs union between Turkey and the EU and increase cooperation in the agricultural and service sectors.

Under a Turkish-EU customs union which came into effect in 1996, Ankara is to be paid \$412.5 million by Europe in compensation for losses due to the lifting of customs barriers.

But Greece has vetoed the payment and vowed in April to extend its opposition to other planned Turkish-EU cooperation projects. The EU has altogether promised to extend more than \$2.5 billion through other funds.

Riyadh: Bombers of U.S. base were all Saudis

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — A Saudi official for the first time Thursday acknowledged that only Saudi nationals were behind the June 1996 bombing that killed 19 U.S. airmen at a base in the eastern city of Dhahran.

The bombing of Dhahran "was carried out by Saudi hands," Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Ben Abdul Aziz said in an

interview to be published Friday by the Kuwaiti daily Al Rai Al Am.

"No foreign party had a role" in the bombing which cost the lives of 19 U.S. servicemen, Prince Nayef told the paper.

It is the first time that a Saudi official has so clearly ruled out any foreign participation in the bombing.

In the past the Saudi

authorities have sought to play down suggestions that it faces any internal opposition organised enough to carry out an attack of the sophistication of the 1996 lorry-bomb attack against the U.S. base.

Prince Nayef hinted that the Saudi security services were currently holding and questioning suspects in connection with the attack.

Viagra turns into talk of Arabian peninsula

DUBAI (AFP) — The impotency drug Viagra has become the talk of the macho Arabian peninsula, where sexual impotence is seen as a humiliation and a disgrace.

From Kuwait to Yemen, pharmacies are being flooded with requests for the U.S.-approved drug even though imports have yet to be authorised in any of the states of the region.

Initial reaction from religious authorities has been cautious.

"A married man with physical or psychological troubles which prevent him having a climax has the right to experiment with Viagra, but only with his wife," said Sheikh Mahmood Khalifa, in charge of Islamic affairs in Dubai.

"A bachelor must not use this medicine which incites vice," he warned.

The health ministry in the United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a member, has said the drug produced by the pharmaceutical firm Pfizer would not go on sale legally before the end of the year.

But pills are being smuggled into the Gulf from Egypt and the United States, accord-

ing to regional health officials, who have warned the public of side-effects from Viagra.

"Every day, I get dozens of calls asking for Viagra, women included," a Dubai pharmacist told AFP.

A man in his 70s is reported to have offered a local pharmacist \$150 just for two of the pills, compared to the official price of \$10 each on prescription in the United States.

Some pharmacies in Saudi Arabia are selling the pills under the counter, for between \$50 and \$80 a shot, according to newspapers in Riyadh, where authorities have instructed scientists to draw up a report on the drug.

The Kuwaiti health ministry has warned of all kinds of side-effects: on the heart, blood circulation, digestive system, breathing, genitals, nervous system and vision.

But any warnings are being brushed aside in a region where sexual impotence for men has traditionally been treated by herbal concoctions, and of course with the utmost discretion.

King, Queen b

AMMAN (AP) — The King and Queen of Jordan on Saturday short private visit to the United Arab Emirates were received at the Highness Crown Prince Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Royal Highness Salim bin Hamad bin Khalifa and senior military

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Irish c Blair: It's a of Northern

RELFEST (AFP) — In a historic step towards voters in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic resoundingly backed a peace deal designed to end one decade of sectarian violence in the troubled province. According to official results released on Saturday, the peace deal was approved by 71.12 per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland and 94.34 per cent of the vote in the Republic.

The deal was submitted to a referendum, north and south of the border Friday. The amount in both votes was a record as voters delivered their judgement on the peace settlement thrust upon them by the province's political parties in April 1998 after two years of talks.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair helped to broker the agreement and played a key role in pushing for a "yes" vote in the last few days of campaigning, welcomed the result, also wanted of difficulties.

It is a day to say I pay tribute to the people of Northern Ireland for their courage and for their belief in a better future. I am proud to be a part of this historic day. I believe this is another step along the path towards peace and hope in the north. Mr. Blair said "It is a day to say I pay tribute to the people of Northern Ireland for their courage and for their belief in a better future. I am proud to be a part of this historic day. I believe this is another step along the path towards peace and hope in the north."

PNA calls for Haram Al S

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinian leaders called for a mass gathering at the site of Islam's third holiest site, the Haram Al Sharif in Jerusalem, to start Jewish exodus from the city, marking the 50th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration.

"A mass gathering will take place Sunday on the Haram Al Sharif and we will use it as an attempt to provoke a 'peace' in the Palestinian occupied territories," said a spokesman for the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

"If the Israeli authorities do not agree to stop provocative acts by extremist Jews, they will bear the entire responsibility for whatever takes place," he added.

The Haram Al Sharif compound contains the Al Aqsa Mosque and is Islam's third holiest site after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Both extremists have long stood for the clearing of the Al Aqsa Mosque complex, which is seen as a Jewish temple and prelude to rebuilding.

The official for Islamic religious endowment in Jerusalem, Sheikh Adnan al-Husseini, said "Palestinians will block by all means and at any price any attempts by extremists to

the call by Palestinian officials to come as Israel prepares to celebrate on Sunday its 50th anniversary "Jerusalem Day" of the Arab eastern sector of the city after it was occupied

Jerusalem and the militant spokesman Rabbis said "We have warnings thing going on in the capital of